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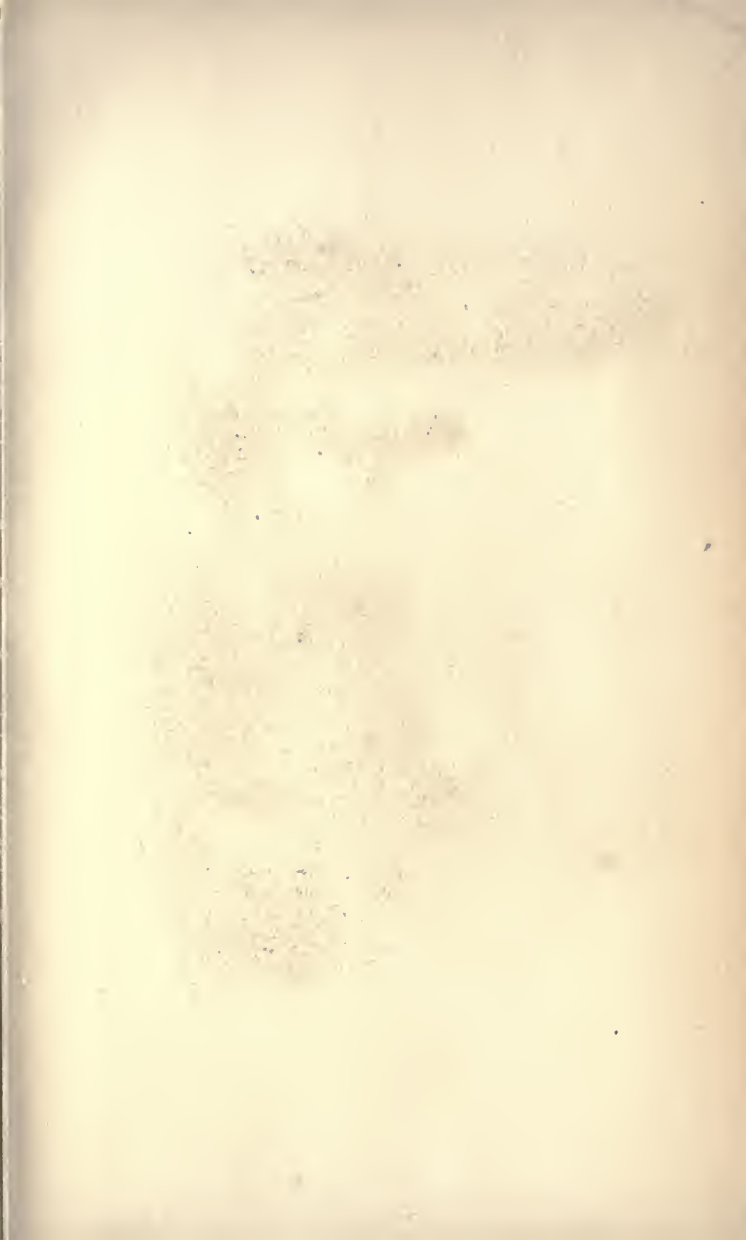


Thos. Cortis.





THE
LIFE AND WORKS
OF
WILLIAM COWPER.





Engraved by E. Finden.

Huntingdon

London: Saunders & Otley, Cornhill Street.

Drawn by J. D. Harding

THE
LIFE AND WORKS
OF
WILLIAM COWPER.
VOL. III.



Drawn by J. D. Harding.

Engraved by

Northford, near Huntingdon.

*"Thou wert too good to live on Earth with me,
And I not good enough to die with thee."*

Vol. I. p. 40

LONDON. SAUNDERS & OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET



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THE WORKS
OF
WILLIAM COWPER
HIS
LIFE AND LETTERS
BY WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.
NOW FIRST COMPLETED BY THE INTRODUCTION OF
COWPER'S PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE.

EDITED BY
THE REV. T. S. GRIMSHAW, A.M.

RECTOR OF BURTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, AND VICAR OF
BIDDENHAM, BEDFORDSHIRE, AUTHOR OF THE LIFE OF THE REV. LEON RICHMOND.

Letters, such as are written from wise men, are, of all the words of men, in my
judgment the best. LORD BACON.

VOL. III.

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LONDON
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.
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THE
LIFE OF COWPER.

Part the Second—Continued.

THE completion of the second volume of Cowper's poems formed an important period in his literary history. It was the era of the establishment of his poetical fame. His first volume had already laid the foundation; the second raised the superstructure, which has secured for him a reputation as honourable as it is likely to be lasting. He was more particularly indebted for this distinction to his inimitable production, "The Task," a work which every succeeding year has increasingly stamped with the seal of public approbation. If we inquire into the causes of its celebrity, they are to be found not merely in the multitude of poetical beauties, scattered throughout the poem; it is the faithful delineation of nature and of the scenes of real life; it is the vein of pure and elevated morality, the exquisite sensibility of feeling, and the powerful appeals to the heart and conscience, which constitute its great charm

and interest. The court, the town, and the country, all united in its praise, because conscience and nature never suffer their rights to be extinguished, except in minds the most perverted or depraved. These rights are coeval with our birth; they grow with our growth, and yield only to that universal decree, which levels taste, perception, and every moral feeling with the dust; and which will finally dissolve the whole system of created nature, and merge time itself in eternity.

Cowper's second volume, containing his "Task," and "Tirocinium," to which some smaller pieces were afterwards attached, was ready for the press in November, 1784,* though its publication was delayed till June 1785. The close of a literary undertaking is always contemplated as an event of great interest to the feelings of an author. It is the termination of his labours and the commencement of his hopes and fears. Gibbon the historian has thought proper to record the precise hour and day, in which he concluded his laborious work of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," with feelings of a mingled and impressive character.

"I have presumed," he says, "to mark the moment of conception: I shall now commemorate the hour of my final deliverance. It was on the day, or rather night, of the 27th of June, 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page, in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen, I

* See vol. ii. p. 177.

took several turns in a *berceau*, or covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene, the silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not dissemble the first emotions of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and, perhaps, the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatever might be the future date of my history, the life of the historian might be short and precarious."*

These chastened feelings are implanted by a Divine Power, to check the pride and exultation of genius, and to maintain the mind in lowly humility. Nor is Pope's reflection less just and affecting: "The morning after my exit," he observes, "the sun will rise as bright as ever, the flowers smell as sweet, the plants spring as green, the world will proceed in its old course, and people laugh and marry as they were used to do."†

What then is the moral that is conveyed? If life be so evanescent, if its toils and labours, its sorrows and joys, so quickly pass away, it becomes us to leave some memorial behind, that we have not lived unprofitably either to others or to our-

* See Life and Writings of Edward Gibbon, p. 30, prefixed to his "Decline and Fall," &c.

† See Pope's Letters.

selves; to keep the mind free from prejudice, the heart from passion, and the life from error; to enlighten the ignorant, to raise the fallen, and to comfort the depressed; to scatter round us the endearments of kindness, and diffuse a spirit of righteousness, of benevolence, and of truth; to enjoy the sunshine of an approving conscience, and the blessedness of inward joy and peace; that thus, when the closing scene shall at length arrive, the ebbings of the dissolving frame may be sustained by the triumph of christian hope, and death prove the portal of immortality.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Jan. 5, 1785.

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I have observed, and you must have had occasion to observe it oftener than I, that when a man who once seemed to be a Christian has put off that character and resumed his old one, he loses, together with the grace which he seemed to possess, the most amiable part of the character that he resumes. The best features of his natural face seem to be struck out, that after having worn religion only as a handsome mask he may make a more disgusting appearance than he did before he assumed it.

According to your request, I subjoin my epitaph on Dr. Johnson; at least I mean to do it, if a drum,

* Private Correspondence.

which at this moment announces the arrival of a giant in the town, will give me leave.

Yours,

W. C.

EPITAPH ON DR. JOHNSON.

Here Johnson lies—a sage, by all allow'd,
Whom to have bred may well make England proud ;
Whose prose was eloquence by wisdom taught,
The graceful vehicle of virtuous thought ;
Whose verse may claim, grave, masculine, and strong,
Superior praise to the mere poet's song ;
Who many a noble gift from Heaven possess'd,
And faith at last—alone worth all the rest.
O man immortal by a double prize,
By fame on earth, by glory in the skies !

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Jan. 15, 1785.

My dear William—Your letters are always welcome. You can always either find something to say, or can amuse me and yourself with a sociable and friendly way of saying nothing. I never found that a letter was the more easily written, because the writing of it had been long delayed. On the contrary, experience has taught me to answer soon, that I may do it without difficulty. It is in vain to wait for an accumulation of materials in a situation such as your's and mine, productive of few events. At the end of our expectations we shall find ourselves as poor as at the beginning.

I can hardly tell you with any certainty of infor-

mation, upon what terms Mr. Newton and I may be supposed to stand at present. A month (I believe) has passed, since I heard from him. But my *friseur*, having been in London in the course of this week, whence he returned last night, and having called at Hoxton, brought me his love and an excuse for his silence, which, he said, had been occasioned by the frequency of his preachings at this season. He was not pleased that my manuscript was not first transmitted to him, and I have cause to suspect that he was even mortified at being informed that a certain inscribed poem was not inscribed to himself. But we shall jumble together again, as people that have an affection for each other at bottom, notwithstanding now and then a slight disagreement, always do.

I know not whether Mr. —— has acted in consequence of your hint, or whether, not needing one, he transmitted to us his bounty before he had received it. He has however sent us a note for twenty pounds; with which we have performed wonders in behalf of the ragged and the starved. He is a most extraordinary young man, and, though I shall probably never see him, will always have a niche in the museum of my reverential remembrance.

The death of Dr. Johnson has set a thousand scribblers to work, and me among the rest. While I lay in bed, waiting till I could reasonably hope that the parlour might be ready for me, I invoked the Muse and composed the following epitaph.*

* The same which has been inserted in the preceding letter.

It is destined, I believe, to the "Gentleman's Magazine, which I consider as a respectable repository for small matters, which, when entrusted to a newspaper, can expect but the duration of a day. But, Nichols having at present a small piece of mine in his hands, not yet printed, (it is called the Poplar Field, and I suppose you have it,) I wait till his obstetrical aid has brought that to light, before I send him a new one. In his last he published my epitaph upon Tiney;* which, I likewise imagine, has been long in your collection.

Not a word yet from Johnson; I am easy however upon the subject, being assured that, so long as his own interest is at stake, he will not want a monitor to remind him of the proper time to publish.

You and your family have our sincere love. Forget not to present my respectful compliments to Miss Unwin, and, if you have not done it already, thank her on my part for the very agreeable narrative of Lunardi. He is a young man, I presume, of great good sense and spirit, (his letters at least and his enterprising turn bespeak him such,) a man qualified to shine not only among the stars,* but in the more useful though humbler sphere of terrestrial occupation.

* One of Cowper's favourite hares.

"Here lies, whom hound did ne'er pursue,
Nor swifter greyhound follow," &c.

See POEMS, vol. ii.

† Lunardi's name is associated with the aeronauts of that time.

I have been crossing the channel in a balloon, ever since I read of that achievement by Blanchard.* I have an insatiable thirst to know the philosophical reason why his vehicle had like to have fallen into the sea, when, for aught that appears, the gas was not at all exhausted. Did not the extreme cold condense the inflammable air, and cause the globe to collapse? Tell me, and be my Apollo for ever!

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

The incident connected with the Poplar Field, mentioned in the former part of the above letter, is recorded in the verses. The place where the poplars grew is called Lavendon Mills, about a mile from Olney; it was one of Cowper's favourite walks. After a long absence, on revisiting the spot, he found the greater part of his beloved trees lying prostrate on the ground. Four only survived, and they have but recently shared the same fate. But poetry can dignify the minutest events, and convert the ardour of hope or the pang of disappointment into an occasion for pouring forth the sweet melody of song. It is to the above incident that we are indebted for the following verses, which unite the charm of simple imagery with a beautiful and affecting moral at the close.

* Blanchard, accompanied by Dr. Jeffries, took his departure for Calais from the Castle at Dover. When within five or six miles of the French coast, the balloon fell rapidly towards the sea, and, had it not been lightened and a breeze sprung up, they must have perished in the waves.

THE POPLAR FIELD.

The poplars are felled, farewell to the shade,
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade;
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,
Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.

Twelve years have elaps'd, since I last took a view
Of my favourite field, and the bank where they grew ;
And now in the grass behold they are laid,
And the tree is my seat, that once lent me a shade.

The blackbird has fled to another retreat,
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat,
And the scene, where his melody charm'd me before,
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more.

My fugitive years are hasting away,
And I must ere long lie as lowly as they,
With a turf on my breast and a stone at my head,
Ere another such grove shall arise in its stead.

The change both my heart and my fancy employs ;
I reflect on the frailty of man and his joys ;
Short-lived as we are, yet our pleasures, we see,
Have a still shorter date, and die sooner than we.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Jan. 22, 1785.

My dear Friend—The departure of the long frost, by which we were pinched and squeezed together for three weeks, is a most agreeable circumstance. The

* Private Correspondence.

weather is now (to speak poetically) genial and jocund; and the appearance of the sun, after an eclipse, peculiarly welcome. For, were it not that I have a gravel walk about sixty yards long, where I take my daily exercise, I should be obliged to look at a fine day through the window, without any other enjoyment of it; a country rendered impassable by frost, that has been at last resolved into rottenness, keeps me so close a prisoner. Long live the inventors and improvers of balloons! It is always clear overhead, and by and by we shall use no other road.

How will the Parliament employ themselves when they meet?—to any purpose, or to none, or only to a bad one? They are utterly out of my favour. I despair of them altogether. Will they pass an act for the cultivation of the royal wildernesses? Will they make an effectual provision for a northern fishery? Will they establish a new sinking fund that shall infallibly pay off the national debt? I say nothing about a more equal representation,* because, unless they bestow upon private gentlemen of no property the privilege of voting, I stand no chance of ever being represented myself. Will they achieve all these wonders, or none of them? And shall I derive no other advantage from the great Wittena-Gemot of the nation, than merely to

* Mr. Pitt had introduced, at this time, his celebrated bill for effecting a reform in the national representation; the leading feature of which was to transfer the elective franchise from the smaller and decayed boroughs to the larger towns. The proposition was, however, rejected by a considerable majority.

read their debates, for twenty folios of which I would not give one farthing?

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Feb. 7, 1785.

My dear Friend—We live in a state of such uninterrupted retirement, in which incidents worthy to be recorded occur so seldom, that I always sit down to write with a discouraging conviction that I have nothing to say. The event commonly justifies the presage. For, when I have filled my sheet, I find that I have said nothing. Be it known to you, however, that I may now at least communicate a piece of intelligence to which you will not be altogether indifferent; that I have received and returned to Johnson the two first proof-sheets of my new publication. The business was dispatched indeed a fortnight ago, since when I have heard from him no further. From such a beginning, however, I venture to prognosticate the progress, and in due time the conclusion, of the matter.

In the last Gentleman's Magazine my Poplar Field appears. I have accordingly sent up two pieces more, a Latin translation of it, which you have never seen, and another on a rose-bud, the neck of which I inadvertently broke, which whether you have seen or not I know not. As fast as Nichols prints off the poems I send him, I send him new ones. My remittance usually consists of

two; and he publishes one of them at a time. I may indeed furnish him at this rate, without putting myself to any great inconvenience. For my last supply was transmitted to him in August, and is but now exhausted.

I communicate the following at your mother's instance, who will suffer no part of my praise to be sunk in oblivion. A certain lord has hired a house at Clifton, in our neighbourhood, for a hunting seat.* There he lives at present with his wife and daughter. They are an exemplary family in some respects, and (I believe) an amiable one in all. The Reverend Mr. Jones, the curate of that parish, who often dines with them by invitation on a Sunday, recommended my volume to their reading; and his lordship, after having perused a part of it, expressed an ardent desire to be acquainted with the author, from motives which my great modesty will not suffer me to particularize. Mr. Jones, however, like a wise man, informed his lordship that, for certain special reasons and causes, I had declined going into company for many years, and that therefore he must not hope for my acquaintance. His lordship most civilly subjoined that he was sorry for it. "And is that all?" say you. Now were I to hear you say so, I should look foolish and say, "Yes." But, having you at a distance, I snap my fingers at you and say, "No, that is not all." Mr. ———, who favours us now and then with his company in an evening as usual, was not long since discoursing with that eloquence which is so peculiar to himself, on the many providential

* Lord Peterborough.

interpositions that had taken place in his favour. "He had wished for many things," he said, "which, at the time when he formed these wishes, seemed distant and improbable, some of them indeed impossible. Among other wishes that he had indulged, one was that he might be connected with men of genius and ability—and, in my connexion with this worthy gentleman," said he, turning to me, "that wish, I am sure, is amply gratified." You may suppose that I felt the sweat gush out upon my forehead when I heard this speech; and if you do, you will not be at all mistaken. So much was I delighted with the delicacy of that incense.

Thus far I proceeded easily enough; and here I laid down my pen, and spent some minutes in recollection, endeavouring to find some subject with which I might fill the little blank that remains. But none presents itself. Farewell therefore, and remember those who are mindful of you!

Present our love to all your comfortable fireside, and believe me ever most affectionately yours,

W. C.

They that read Greek with the accents, would pronounce the ϵ in $\phi\iota\lambda\epsilon\omega$ as an η . But I do not hold with that practice, though educated in it. I should therefore utter it just as I do the Latin word *filio*, taking the quantity for my guide.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Feb. 19, 1785.

My dear Friend—I am obliged to you for apprising me of the various occasions of delay to which your letters are liable. Furnished with such a key, I shall be able to account for any accidental tardiness, without supposing any thing worse than that you yourself have been interrupted, or that your messenger has not been punctual.

Mr. Teedon has just left us.* He came to exhibit to us a specimen of his kinsman's skill in the art of book-binding. The book on which he had exercised his ingenuity was your *Life*. You did not indeed make a very splendid appearance; but, considering that you were dressed by an untaught artificer, and that it was his first attempt, you had no cause to be dissatisfied. The young man has evidently the possession of talents, by which he might shine for the benefit of others and for his own, did not his situation smother him. He can make a dulcimer, tune it, play upon it, and with common advantages would undoubtedly have been able to make a harpsichord. But unfortunately he lives where neither the one nor the other is at all in vogue. He can convert the shell of a cocoa-nut into a decent drinking-cup; but, when he has done, he must either fill it at the pump, or use it merely as an ornament of his own mantel-tree. In like

* Private Correspondence.

† He was an intelligent schoolmaster at Olney.

manner, he can bind a book; but, if he would have books to bind, he must either make them or buy them, for we have few or no literati at Olney. Some men have talents with which, they do mischief; and others have talents with which if they do no mischief to others, at least they can do but little good to themselves. They are however always a blessing, unless by our own folly we make them a curse; for, if we cannot turn them to a lucrative account, they may however furnish us, at many a dull season, with the means of innocent amusement. Such is the use that Mr. Killingworth makes of his; and this evening we have, I think, made him happy, having furnished him with two octavo volumes, in which the principles and practice of all ingenious arts are inculcated and explained. I make little doubt that, by the half of it, he will in time be able to perform many feats, for which he will never be one farthing the richer, but by which nevertheless himself and his kin will be much diverted.

The winter returning upon us at this late season with redoubled severity is an event unpleasant even to us who are well furnished with fuel, and seldom feel much of it, unless when we step into bed or get out of it; but how much more formidable to the poor! When ministers talk of resources, that word never fails to send my imagination into the mud-wall cottages of our poor at Oiney. There I find assembled in one individual the miseries of age, sickness, and the extremest penury. We have many such instances around us. The parish perhaps allows such an one a shilling a week; but, being

numbed with cold and crippled by disease, she cannot possibly earn herself another. Such persons therefore suffer all that famine can inflict upon them, only that they are not actually starved; a catastrophe which to many of them I suppose would prove a happy release. One cause of all this misery is the exorbitant taxation with which the country is encumbered, so that to the poor the few pence they are able to procure have almost lost their value. Yet the budget will be opened soon, and soon we shall hear of resources. But I could conduct the statesman who rolls down to the House in a chariot as splendid as that of Phaëton into scenes that, if he had any sensibility for the woes of others, would make him tremble at the mention of the word.— This, however, is not what I intended when I began this paragraph. I was going to observe that, of all the winters we have passed at Olney, and this is the seventeenth, the present has confined us most. Thrice, and but thrice, since the middle of October, have we escaped into the fields for a little fresh air and a little change of motion. The last time indeed it was at some peril that we did it, Mrs. Unwin having slipped into a ditch, and, though I performed the part of an active 'squire upon the occasion, escaped out of it upon her hands and knees.

If the town afford any other news than I here send you, it has not reached me yet. I am in perfect health, at least of body, and Mrs. Unwin is tolerably well. Adieu! We remember you always, you and yours, with as much affection as you can desire; which being said, and said truly,

leaves me quite at a loss for any other conclusion than that of

W. C.

TO JOSEPH HILL ESQ.*

Olney, Feb. 27, 1785.

My dear Friend—I write merely to inquire after your health, and with a sincere desire to hear that you are better. Horace somewhere advises his friend to give his client the slip, and come and spend the evening with him. I am not so inconsiderate as to recommend the same measure to you, because we are not such very near neighbours as a trip of that sort requires that we should be. But I do verily wish that you would favour me with just five minutes of the time that properly belongs to your clients, and place it to my account. Employ it, I mean, in telling me that you are better at least, if not recovered.

I have been pretty much indisposed myself since I wrote last; but except in point of strength am now as well as before. My disorder was what is commonly called and best understood by the name of a thorough cold; which being interpreted, no doubt you well know, signifies shiverings, aches, burnings, lassitude, together with many other ills that flesh is heir to. James's powder is my nostrum on all such occasions, and never fails.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

* Private Correspondence.

The next letter discovers the playful and sportive wit of Cowper.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, March 19, 1785.

My dear Friend—You will wonder no doubt when I tell you that I write upon a card-table; and will be still more surprised when I add that we breakfast, dine, sup, upon a card-table. In short, it serves all purposes, except the only one for which it was originally designed. The solution of this mystery shall follow, lest it should run in your head at a wrong time, and should puzzle you perhaps when you are on the point of ascending your pulpit: for I have heard you say that at such seasons your mind is often troubled with impertinent intrusions. The round table which we formerly had in use was unequal to the pressure of my superincumbent breast and elbows. When I wrote upon it, it creaked and tilted, and by a variety of inconvenient tricks disturbed the process. The fly-table was too slight and too small; the square dining-table too heavy and too large, occupying, when its leaves were spread, almost the whole parlour; and the sideboard-table, having its station at too great a distance from the fire, and not being easily shifted out of its place and into it again, by reason of its size, was equally unfit for my purpose. The card-table, therefore, which had for sixteen years been banished as mere lumber; the card-table, which is

*. Private Correspondence.

covered with green baize, and is therefore preferable to any other that has a slippery surface; the card-table, that stands firm and never totters,—is advanced to the honour of assisting me upon my scribbling occasions, and, because we choose to avoid the trouble of making frequent changes in the position of our household furniture, proves equally serviceable upon all others, It has cost us now and then the downfall of a glass: for, when covered with a table-cloth, the fish-ponds are not easily discerned; and, not being seen, are sometimes as little thought of. But, having numerous good qualities which abundantly compensate that single inconvenience, we spill upon it our coffee, our wine, and our ale, without murmuring, and resolve that it shall be our table still to the exclusion of all others. Not to be tedious, I will add but one more circumstance upon the subject, and that only because it will impress upon you, as much as any thing that I have said, a sense of the value we set upon its escorial capacity. Parched and penetrated on one side by the heat of the fire, it has opened into a large fissure, which pervades not the moulding of it only, but the very substance of the plank. At the mouth of this aperture a sharp splinter presents itself, which, as sure as it comes in contact with a gown or an apron, tears it. It happens unfortunately to be on that side of this excellent and never-to-be-forgotten table which Mrs. Unwin sweeps with her apparel, almost as often as she rises from her chair. The consequences need not, to use the fashionable phrase, be given in detail: but the needle sets all to rights;

and the card-table still holds possession of its functions without a rival.

Clean roads and milder weather have once more released us, opening a way for our escape into our accustomed walks. We have both I believe been sufferers by such a long confinement. Mrs. Unwin has had a nervous fever all the winter, and I a stomach that has quarrelled with every thing, and not seldom even with its bread and butter. Her complaint I hope is at length removed; but mine seems more obstinate, giving way to nothing that I can oppose to it, except just in the moment when the opposition is made. I ascribe this malady—both our maladies, indeed—in a great measure to our want of exercise. We have each of us practised more in other days than lately we have been able to take; and, for my own part, till I was more than thirty years old, it was almost essential to my comfort to be perpetually in motion. My constitution therefore misses, I doubt not, its usual aids of this kind; and, unless for purposes which I cannot foresee, Providence should interpose to prevent it, will probably reach the moment of its dissolution the sooner for being so little disturbed. A vitiated digestion I believe always terminates, if not cured, in the production of some chronical disorder. In several I have known it produce a dropsy. But no matter. Death is inevitable; and whether we die to-day or to-morrow, a watery death or a dry one, is of no consequence. The state of our spiritual health is all. Could I discover a few more symptoms of convalescence there, this body might moulder

into its original dust without one sigh from me. Nothing of all this did I mean to say; but I have said it, and must now seek another subject.

One of our most favourite walks is spoiled. The spinney is cut down to the stumps—even the lilacs and the syringas, to the stumps. Little did I think, (though indeed I might have thought it,) that the trees which skreened me from the sun last summer would this winter be employed in roasting potatoes and boiling tea-kettles for the poor of Olney. But so it has proved; and we ourselves have at this moment more than two waggon-loads of them in our wood-loft.

Such various services can trees perform;
Whom once they skreen'd from heat, in time they warm.

A letter from Manchester reached our town last Sunday, addressed to the mayor or other chief magistrate of Olney. The purport of it was to excite him and his neighbours to petition Parliament against the concessions to Ireland that Government has in contemplation. Mr. Maurice Smith, as constable, took the letter. But whether that most respectable personage amongst us intends to comply with the terms of it, or not, I am ignorant. For myself, however, I can pretty well answer, that I shall sign no petition of the sort; both because I do not think myself competent to a right understanding of the question, and because it appears to me that, whatever be the event, no place in England can be less concerned in it than Olney.

We rejoice that you are all well. Our love at-

tends Mrs. Newton and yourself, and the young ladies.

I am yours, my dear friend, as usual,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, March 20, 1785.

My dear William—I thank you for your letter. It made me laugh, and there are not many things capable of being contained within the dimensions of a letter for which I see cause to be more thankful. I was pleased too to see my opinion of his lordship's *nonchalance*, upon a subject that you had so much at heart, completely verified. I do not know that the eye of a nobleman was ever dissected. I cannot help supposing, however, that were that organ, as it exists in the head of such a personage, to be accurately examined, it would be found to differ materially in its construction from the eye of a commoner; so very different is the view that men in an elevated and in an humble station have of the same object. What appears great, sublime, beautiful, and important to you and to me, when submitted to my lord or his grace, and submitted too with the utmost humility, is either too minute to be visible at all, or, if seen, seems trivial and of no account. My supposition therefore seems not altogether chimerical.

In two months I have corrected proof-sheets to the amount of ninety-three pages, and no more. In

other words, I have received three packets. Nothing is quick enough for impatience, and I suppose that the impatience of an author has the quickest of all possible movements. It appears to me, however, that at this rate we shall not publish till next autumn. Should you happen therefore to pass Johnson's door, pop in your head as you go, and just insinuate to him that, were his remittances rather more frequent, that frequency would be no inconvenience to me. I much expected one this evening, a fortnight having now elapsed since the arrival of the last. But none came, and I felt myself a little mortified. I took up the newspaper, however, and read it. There I found that the emperor and the Dutch are, after all their negotiations, going to war. Such reflections as these struck me. A great part of Europe is going to be involved in the greatest of all calamities: troops are in motion—artillery is drawn together—cabinets are busied in contriving schemes of blood and devastation—thousands will perish who are incapable of understanding the dispute, and thousands who, whatever the event may be, are little more interested in it than myself, will suffer unspeakable hardships in the course of the quarrel.—Well! Mr. Poet, and how then? You have composed certain verses, which you are desirous to see in print, and, because the impression seems to be delayed, you are displeased, not to say dispirited. Be ashamed of yourself! you live in a world in which your feelings may find worthier subjects—be concerned for the havoc of nations,

and mourn over your retarded volume, when you find a dearth of more important tragedies !

You postpone certain topics of conference to our next meeting. When shall it take place ? I do not wish for you just now, because the garden is a wilderness, and so is all the country around us. In May we shall have 'sparagus, and weather in which we may stroll to Weston ; at least we may hope for it ; therefore come in May ; you will find us happy to receive you and as much of your fair household as you can bring with you.

We are very sorry for your uncle's indisposition. The approach of summer seems however to be in his favour, that season being of all remedies for the rheumatism, I believe, the most effectual.

I thank you for your intelligence concerning the celebrity of John Gilpin. You may be sure that it was agreeable ; but your own feelings, on occasion of that article, pleased me most of all. Well, my friend, be comforted ! You had not an opportunity of saying publicly, " I know the author." But the author himself will say as much for you soon, and perhaps will feel in doing so a gratification equal to your own.*

In the affair of face-painting, I am precisely of your opinion.

Adieu,

W. C.

* He alludes to the poem of " Tirocinium," which was inscribed to Mr. Unwin.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, April 9, 1785.

My dear Friend—In a letter to the printer of the Northampton Mercury, we have the following history:—An ecclesiastic of the name of Zichen, German superintendent or Lutheran bishop of Zetterfeldt, in the year 1779 delivered to the courts of Hanover and Brunswick a prediction to the following purport: that an earthquake is at hand, the greatest and most destructive ever known; that it will originate in the Alps and in their neighbourhood, especially at Mount St. Gothard; at the foot of which mountain it seems four rivers have their source, of which the Rhine is one †—the names of the rest I have forgotten—they are all to be swallowed up; that the earth will open into an immense fissure, which will divide all Europe, reaching from the aforesaid mountain to the states of Holland; that the Zuyder Sea will be absorbed in the gulf; that the Bristol Channel will be no more; in short, that the north of Europe will be separated from the south, and that seven thousand cities, towns, and villages will be destroyed. This prediction he delivered at the aforesaid courts in the

* Private Correspondence.

† This is a geographical error. The Rhine takes its rise in the canton of the Grisons. It is the Rhone which derives its source from the western flank of Mount St. Gothard, where there are three springs, which unite their waters to that torrent. The river Aar rises not far distant, but there is no other river.—EDIT.

year seventy-nine, asserting that in February following the commotion would begin, and that by Easter 1786 the whole would be accomplished. Accordingly, between the 15th and 27th of February, in the year eighty, the public gazettes and newspapers took notice of several earthquakes in the Alps, and in the regions at their foot; particularly about Mount St. Gothard. From this partial fulfilment, Mr. O—— argues the probability of a complete one, and exhorts the world to watch and be prepared. He adds moreover that Mr. Zichen was a pious man, a man of science, and a man of sense; and that when he gave in his writing he offered to swear to it—I suppose, as a revelation from above. He is since dead.

Nothing in the whole affair pleases me so much as that he has named a short day for the completion of his prophecy. It is tedious work to hold the judgment in suspense for many years; but any body methinks may wait with patience till a twelve-month shall pass away, especially when an earthquake of such magnitude is in question. I do not say that Mr. Zichen is deceived; but, if he be not, I will say that he is the first modern prophet who has not both been a subject of deception himself and a deceiver of others. A year will show.

Our love attends all your family. Believe me,
my dear friend, affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, April 22, 1785.

My dear Friend—When I received your account of the great celebrity of John Gilpin, I felt myself both flattered and grieved. Being man, and having in my composition all the ingredients of which other men are made, and vanity among the rest, it pleased me to reflect that I was on a sudden become so famous, and that all the world was busy inquiring after me: but, the next moment, recollecting my former self, and that thirteen years ago, as harmless as John's history is, I should not then have written it, my spirits sank and I was ashamed of my success. Your letter was followed the next post by one from Mr. Unwin. You tell me that I am rivalled by Mrs. Bellamy;† and he, that I have a competitor for fame not less formidable in the Learned Pig. Alas! what is an author's popularity worth in a world that can suffer a prostitute on one side, and a pig on the other, to eclipse his brightest glories? I am therefore sufficiently humbled by these considerations; and, unless I should hereafter be ordained to engross the public attention by means more magnificent than a song, am persuaded that I shall suffer no real detriment by their applause. I have produced many things, under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted

* Private Correspondence.

† A celebrated actress, who wrote her memoirs, which were much read at that time.

to spring. But, if the soil of that melancholy, in which I have walked so long, has thrown up here and there an unprofitable fungus, it is well at least that it is not chargeable with having brought forth poison. Like you, I see or think I can see, that Gilpin may have his use. Causes, in appearance trivial, produce often the most beneficial consequences; and perhaps my volumes may now travel to a distance, which, if they had not been ushered into the world by that notable horseman, they would never have reached. Our temper differs somewhat from that of the ancient Jews. They would neither dance nor weep. We indeed weep not, if a man mourn unto us; but I must needs say that, if he pipe, we seem disposed to dance with the greatest alacrity.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, April 30, 1785.

My dear Friend—I return you thanks for a letter so warm with the intelligence of the celebrity of John Gilpin. I little thought, when I mounted him upon my Pegasus, that he would become so famous. I have learned also from Mr. Newton that he is equally renowned in Scotland, and that a lady there had undertaken to write a second part, on the subject of Mrs. Gilpin's return to London; but, not succeeding in it as she wished, she dropped it. He

tells me likewise that the head master of St. Paul's school (who he is I know not) has conceived, in consequence of the entertainment that John has afforded him, a vehement desire to write to me. Let us hope he will alter his mind; for, should we even exchange civilities on the occasion, Tirocinium will spoil all. The great estimation however in which this knight of the stone-bottles is held may turn out a circumstance propitious to the volume, of which his history will make a part. Those events that prove the prelude to our greatest success are often apparently trivial in themselves; and such as seemed to promise nothing. The disappointment that Horace mentions is reversed—We design a mug, and it proves a hogshead. It is a little hard that I alone should be unfurnished with a printed copy of this facetious story. When you visit London next, you must buy the most elegant impression of it, and bring it with you. I thank you also for writing to Johnson. I likewise wrote to him myself. Your letter and mine together have operated to admiration. There needs nothing more but that the effect be lasting, and the whole will soon be printed. We now draw towards the middle of the fifth book of "The Task." The man, Johnson, is like unto some vicious horses that I have known. They would not budge till they were spurred, and when they were spurred they would kick. So did he—his temper was somewhat disconcerted; but his pace was quickened, and I was contented.

I was very much pleased with the following

sentence in Mr. Newton's last,—“ I am perfectly satisfied with the propriety of your proceeding as to the publication.”—Now, therefore, we are friends again. Now he once more inquires after the work, which, till he had disburthened himself of this acknowledgment, neither he nor I in any of our letters to each other ever mentioned. Some side-wind has wafted to him a report of those reasons by which I justified my conduct. I never made a secret of them. Both your mother and I have studiously deposited them with those who we thought were most likely to transmit them to him. They wanted only a hearing, which once obtained, their solidity and cogency were such that they were sure to prevail.

You mention ——. I formerly knew the man you mention, but his elder brother much better. We were school-fellows, and he was one of a club of seven Westminster men, to which I belonged, who dined together every Thursday. Should it please God to give me ability to perform the poet's part to some purpose, many whom I once called friends, but who have since treated me with a most magnificent indifference, will be ready to take me by the hand again, and some, whom I never held in that estimation, will, like ——, (who was but a boy when I left London,) boast of a connexion with me which they never had. Had I the virtues, and graces, and accomplishments of St. Paul himself, I might have them at Olney, and nobody would care a button about me, yourself and one or two more excepted. Fame begets favour, and one talent,

if it be rubbed a little bright by use and practice, will procure a man more friends than a thousand virtues. Dr. Johnson, (I believe,) in the life of one of our poets, says that he retired from the world flattering himself that he should be regretted. But the world never missed him. I think his observation upon it is that the vacancy made by the retreat of any individual is soon filled up; that a man may always be obscure, if he chooses to be so; and that he who neglects the world will be by the world neglected.

Your mother and I walked yesterday in the Wilderness. As we entered the gate, a glimpse of something white, contained in a little hole in the gate-post, caught my eye. I looked again, and discovered a bird's nest, with two tiny eggs in it. By-and-by they will be fledged, and tailed, and get wing-feathers, and fly. My case is somewhat similar to that of the parent bird. My nest is in a little nook. Here I brood and hatch, and in due time my progeny takes wing and whistles.

We wait for the time of your coming with pleasant expectations.

Yours truly,

W. C.

The following letter records an impressive instance of the instability of human life; and also contains some references, of deep pathos, to his own personal history and feelings.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, May, 1785.

My dear Friend—I do not know that I shall send you news; but, whether it be news or not, it is necessary that I should relate the fact, lest I should omit an article of intelligence important at least at Olney. The event took place much nearer to you than to us, and yet it is possible that no account of it may yet have reached you.—Mr. Ashburner the elder, went to London on Tuesday se'nnight in perfect health and in high spirits, so as to be remarkably cheerful; and was brought home in a hearse the Friday following. Soon after his arrival in town, he complained of an acute pain in his elbow, then in his shoulder, then in both shoulders; was blooded; took two doses of such medicine as an apothecary thought might do him good; and died on Thursday in the morning at ten o'clock. When I first heard the tidings I could hardly credit them; and yet have lived long enough myself to have seen manifold and most convincing proofs that neither health, great strength, nor even youth itself, afford the least security from the stroke of death. It is not common however for men at the age of thirty-six to die so suddenly. I saw him but a few days before, with a bundle of gloves and hatbands under his arm, at the door of Geary Ball, who lay at that

* Private Correspondence.

time a corpse. The following day I saw him march before the coffin, and lead the procession that attended Geary to the grave. He might be truly said to march, for his step was heroic, his figure athletic, and his countenance as firm and confident as if he had been born only to bury others, and was sure never to be buried himself. Such he appeared to me, while I stood at the window and contemplated his deportment ; and then he died.

I am sensible of the tenderness and affectionate kindness with which you recollect our past intercourse, and express your hopes of my future restoration. I too within the last eight months have had my hopes, though they have been of short duration, cut off like the foam upon the waters. Some previous adjustments indeed are necessary, before a lasting expectation of comfort can have place in me. There are those persuasions in my mind which either entirely forbid the entrance of hope, or, if it enter, immediately eject it. They are incompatible with any such inmate, and must be turned out themselves before so desirable a guest can possibly have secure possession. This, you say, will be done. It may be, but it is not done yet ; nor has a single step in the course of God's dealings with me been taken towards it. If I mend, no creature ever mended so slowly that recovered at last. I am like a slug or snail, that has fallen into a deep well : slug as he is, he performs his descent with an alacrity proportioned to his weight ; but he does not crawl up again quite so fast. Mine was a rapid plunge ; but my return to daylight, if I am indeed returning, is

leisurely enough. I wish you a swift progress, and a pleasant one, through the great subject that you have in hand ;* and set that value upon your letters to which they are in themselves entitled, but which is certainly increased by that peculiar attention which the writer of them pays to me. Were I such as I once was, I should say that I have a claim upon your particular notice which nothing ought to supersede. Most of your other connexions you may fairly be said to have formed by your own act ; but your connexion with me was the work of God. The kine that went up with the ark from Bethshemesh left what they loved behind them, in obedience to an impression which to them was perfectly dark and unintelligible.† Your journey to Huntingdon was not less wonderful. He indeed who sent you knew well wherefore, but you knew not. That dispensation therefore would furnish me, as long as we can both remember it, with a plea for some distinction at your hands, had I occasion to use and urge it, which I have not. But I am altered since that time ; and if your affection for me had ceased, you might very reasonably justify your change by mine. I can say nothing for myself at present ; but this I can venture to foretell, that, should the restoration of which my friends assure me obtain, I shall undoubtedly love those who have continued to love me, even in a state of transforma-

* Mr. Newton was at this time preparing two volumes of Sermons for the press, on the subject of the Messiah, preached on the occasion of the Commemoration of Handel.

† See 1 Sam. vi. 7—10.

tion from my former self, much more than ever. I doubt not that Nebuchadnezzar had friends in his prosperity; all kings have many. But when his nails became like eagles' claws, and he ate grass like an ox, I suppose he had few to pity him.

We are going to pay Mr. Pomfret† a morning visit. Our errand is to see a fine bed of tulips, a sight that I never saw. Fine painting, and God the artist. Mrs. Unwin has something to say in the cover. I leave her therefore to make her own courtesy, and only add that I am yours and Mrs. Newton's

affectionate

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, June 4, 1785.

My dear Friend—Mr. Greatheed had your letter the day after we received it.‡ He is a well-bred, agreeable young man, and one whose eyes have been opened, I doubt not, for the benefit of others, as well as for his own. He preached at Olney a day or two ago, and I have reason to think with acceptance and success. One person, at least, who had been in prison some weeks, received his enlarge-

† The Rector at that time of Emberton, near Olney.

* Private Correspondence.

‡ The Rev. Mr. Greatheed was a man of piety and talent, and much respected in his day. He wrote a short and interesting memoir of Cowper.

ment under him. I should have been glad to have been a hearer, but that privilege is not allowed me yet.

My book is at length printed, and I returned the last proof to Johnson on Tuesday. I have ordered a copy to Charles Square, and have directed Johnson to enclose one with it, addressed to John Bacon, Esq. I was obliged to give you this trouble, not being sure of the place of his abode. I have taken the liberty to mention him, as an artist, in terms that he well deserves. The passage was written soon after I received the engraving with which he favoured me,* and while the impression that it made upon me was yet warm. He will therefore excuse the liberty that I have taken, and place it to the account of those feelings which he himself excited.

The walking season is returned. We visit the Wilderness daily. Mr. Throckmorton last summer presented me with a key of his garden. The family are all absent, except the priest and a servant or two; so that the honeysuckles, lilacs, and syringas, are all our own.

We are well, and our united love attends yourselves and the young ladies.

Yours, my dear friend,

With much affection,

W. C.

* The engraving of Bacon's celebrated monument of Lord Chatham, in Westminster Abbey.

The passage alluded to is as follows:—

..... "Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips."

The Task, Book I.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, June 25, 1785.

My dear Friend—I write in a nook that I call my *boudoir*. It is a summer-house not much bigger than a sedan-chair, the door of which opens into the garden, that is now crowded with pinks, roses, and honeysuckles, and the window into my neighbour's orchard. It formerly served an apothecary, now dead, as a smoking-room; and under my feet is a trap-door which once covered a hole in the ground, where he kept his bottles; at present, however, it is dedicated to sublimer uses. Having lined it with garden-mats, and furnished it with a table and two chairs, here I write all that I write in summer time, whether to my friends or to the public. It is secure from all noise, and a refuge from all intrusion; for intruders sometimes trouble me in the winter evenings at Olney: but (thanks to my *boudoir*!) I can now hide myself from them. A poet's retreat is sacred: they acknowledge the truth of that proposition, and never presume to violate it.*

* Cowper's summer-house is still in existence. It is a small, humble building, situated at the back of the premises which he occupied at Olney, and commanding a full view of the church and of the vicarage-house. Humble however as it appears, it is approached with those feelings of veneration which the scene of so many interesting recollections cannot fail to inspire. There he wrote "The Task," and most of his Poems, except during the rigour of the winter months. There too he carried on that epistolary correspondence, which is distinguished by so much wit, ease, and gracefulness, and by the

The last sentence puts me in mind to tell you that I have ordered my volume to your door. My bookseller is the most dilatory of all his fraternity, or you would have received it long since. It is more than a month since I returned him the last proof, and consequently since the printing was finished. I sent him the manuscript at the beginning of last November, that he might publish while the town was full, and he will hit the exact moment when it is entirely empty. Patience (you will perceive) is in no situation exempted from the severest trials; a remark that may serve to comfort you under the numberless trials of your own.

W. C.

Cowper again feelingly alludes in the letter which follows, to that absence of mental comfort under which he so habitually laboured.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, June 25, 1785.

My dear Friend—A note that we received from Mr. Scott, by your desire, informing us of the amendment of Mrs. Newton's health, demands our thanks, having relieved us from no little anxiety upon her account. The welcome purport of it was soon after confirmed, so that at present we feel ourselves at overflowings of a warm and affectionate heart. No traveller seems to enter without considering it to be the shrine of the Muses, and leaving behind a poetical tribute to the memory of so distinguished an author.

* Private Correspondence.

liberty to hope that by this time Mrs. Newton's recovery is complete. Sally's looks do credit to the air of Hoxton. She seems to have lost nothing, either in complexion or dimensions, by her removal hence ; and, which is still more to the credit of your great town, she seems in spiritual things also to be the very same Sally whom we knew once at Olney. Situation therefore is nothing. They who have the means of grace and an art to use them, will thrive anywhere ; others nowhere. More than a few, who were formerly ornaments of this garden which you once watered, here flourished, and here have seemed to wither. Others, transplanted into a soil apparently less favourable to their growth, either find the exchange an advantage, or at least are not impaired by it. Of myself, who had once both leaves and fruit, but who have now neither, I say nothing, or only this,—that when I am overwhelmed with despair I repine at my barrenness, and think it hard to be thus blighted ; but when a glimpse of hope breaks in upon me, I am contented to be the sapless thing I am, knowing that He who has commanded me to wither can command me to flourish again when He pleases. My experiences however of this latter kind are rare and transient. The light that reaches me cannot be compared either to that of the sun or of the moon. It is a flash in a dark night, during which the heavens seem opened only to shut again.

We inquired, but could not learn, that any thing memorable passed in the last moments of poor Nathan. I listened in expectation that he would at least acknowledge what all who knew him in his

more lively days had so long seen and lamented, his neglect of the best things, and his eager pursuit of riches. But he was totally silent upon that subject. Yet it was evident that the cares of this world had choked in him much of the good seed, and that he was no longer the Nathan whom we have so often heard at the old house, rich in spirit, though poor in expression : whose desires were unutterable in every sense, both because they were too big for language, and because Nathan had no language for them. I believe with you however that he is safe at home. He had a weak head and strong passions, which He who made him well knew, and for which He would undoubtedly make great allowance. The forgiveness of God is large and absolute ; so large, that though in general He calls for confession of our sins, He sometimes dispenses with that preliminary, and will not suffer even the delinquent himself to mention his transgression. He has so forgiven it, that He seems to have forgotten it too, and will have the sinner to forget it also. Such instances perhaps may not be common, but I know that there have been such, and it might be so with Nathan.

I know not what Johnson is about, neither do I now inquire. It will be a month to-morrow since I returned him the last proof. He might, I suppose, have published by this time without hurrying himself into a fever, or breaking his neck through the violence of his dispatch. But having never seen the book advertised, I conclude that he has not. Had the Parliament risen at the usual time, he would have been just too late, and though it sits longer than

usual, or is likely to do so, I should not wonder if he were too late at last. Dr. Johnson laughs at Savage for charging the still-birth of a poem of his upon the bookseller's delay ; yet, when Dr. Johnson had a poem of his own to publish, no man ever discovered more anxiety to meet the market. But I have taken thought about it till I am grown weary of the subject, and at last have placed myself much at my ease upon the cushion of this one resolution, that, if ever I have dealings hereafter with my present manager, we will proceed upon other terms.

Mr. Wright called here last Sunday, by whom Lord Dartmouth made obliging inquiries after the volume, and was pleased to say that he was impatient to see it. I told him that I had ordered a copy to his lordship, which I hoped he would receive, if not soon, at least before he should retire into the country. I have also ordered one to Mr. Barham.

We suffer in this country very much by drought. The corn, I believe, is in most places thin, and the hay harvest amounts in some to not more than the fifth of a crop. Heavy taxes, excessive levies for the poor, and lean acres, have brought our farmers almost to their wits' end ; and many who are not farmers are not very remote from the same point of despondency. I do not despond, because I was never much addicted to anxious thoughts about the future in respect of temporals. But I feel myself a little angry with a minister who, when he imposed a tax upon gloves, was not ashamed to call them a luxury. Caps and boots lined with fur are not accounted a luxury in Russia, neither can gloves be

reasonably deemed such in a climate sometimes hardly less severe than that. Nature indeed is content with little, and luxury seems, in some respect, rather relative than of any fixed construction. Accordingly it may become in time a luxury for an Englishman to wear breeches, because it is possible to exist without them, and because persons of a moderate income may find them too expensive. I hope however to be hid in the dust before that day shall come; for, having worn them so many years, if they be indeed a luxury, they are such a one as I could very ill spare; yet spare them I must, if I cannot afford to wear them.

We are tolerably well in health, and as to spirits, much as usual—seldom better, sometimes worse.

Yours, my dear friend, affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, July 9, 1785.

My dear Friend—You wrong your own judgment when you represent it as not to be trusted; and mine, if you suppose that I have that opinion of it. Had you disapproved, I should have been hurt and mortified. No man's disapprobation would have hurt me more. Your favourable sentiments of my book must consequently give me pleasure in the same proportion. By the post, last Sunday, I had a letter from Lord Dartmouth, in which he thanked

* Private Correspondence.

me for my volume, of which he had read only a part. Of that part however he expresses himself in terms with which my authorship has abundant cause to be satisfied; and adds that the specimen has made him impatient for the whole. I have likewise received a letter from a judicious friend of mine in London, and a man of fine taste, unknown to you, who speaks of it in the same language. Fortified by these cordials, I feel myself qualified to face the world without much anxiety, and delivered in a great measure from those fears which I suppose all men feel upon the like occasion.

My first volume I sent, as you may remember, to the Lord Chancellor, accompanied by a friendly but respectful epistle. His Lordship however thought it not worth his while to return me any answer, or to take the least notice of my present. I sent it also to Colman, with whom I once was intimate. He likewise proved too great a man to recollect me; and, though he has published since, did not account it necessary to return the compliment. I have allowed myself to be a little pleased with an opportunity to show them that I resent their treatment of me, and have sent this book to neither of them. They indeed are the former friends to whom I particularly allude in my epistle to Mr. Hill; and it is possible that they may take to themselves a censure that they so well deserve. If not, it matters not; for I shall never have any communication with them hereafter.

If Mr. Bates has found it difficult to furnish you with a motto to your volumes, I have no reason to

imagine that I shall do it easily. I shall not leave my books unransacked; but there is something so new and peculiar in the occasion that suggested your subject, that I question whether in all the classics can be found a sentence suited to it. Our sins and follies, in this country, assume a shape that heathen writers had never any opportunity to notice. They deified the dead indeed, but not in the Temple of Jupiter.* The new-made god had an altar of his own; and they conducted the ceremony without sacrilege or confusion. It is possible however, and I think barely so, that somewhat may occur susceptible of accommodation to your purpose; and if it should, I shall be happy to serve you with it.

I told you, I believe, that the spinney has been cut down; and, though it may seem sufficient to have mentioned such an occurrence once, I cannot help recurring to the melancholy theme. Last night, at near nine o'clock, we entered it for the first time this summer. We had not walked many yards in it, before we perceived that this pleasant

* Cowper alludes, in this passage, to the Commemoration of Handel, in Westminster Abbey, and its resemblance to an act of canonization. His censure is doubly recorded; in poetry, as well as in prose.

“ Ten thousand sit
 Patiently present at a sacred song,
 Commemoration mad; content to hear
 (O wonderful effect of Music's power!)
 Messiah's eulogy for Handel's sake.
 But less, methinks, than sacrilege might serve,” &c.
The Task, Book vi.

retreat is destined never to be a pleasant retreat again. In one more year, the whole will be a thicket. That which was once the serpentine walk is now in a state of transformation, and is already become as woody as the rest. Poplars and elms without number are springing in the turf. They are now as high as the knee. Before the summer is ended they will be twice as high; and the growth of another season will make them trees. It will then be impossible for any but a sportsman and his dog to penetrate it. The desolation of the whole scene is such that it sunk our spirits. The ponds are dry. The circular one, in front of the hermitage, is filled with flags and rushes; so that if it contains any water, not a drop is visible. The weeping willow at the side of it, the only ornamental plant that has escaped the axe, is dead. The ivy and the moss, with which the hermitage was lined, are torn away; and the very mats that covered the benches have been stripped off, rent in tatters, and trodden under foot. So farewell, spinney; I have promised myself that I will never enter it again. We have both prayed in it: you for me, and I for you. But it is desecrated from this time forth, and the voice of prayer will be heard in it no more. The fate of it in this respect, however deplorable, is not peculiar. The spot where Jacob anointed his pillar, and, which is more apposite, the spot once honoured with the presence of Him who dwelt in the bush, have long since suffered similar disgrace, and are become common ground.

There is great severity in the application of the

text you mention—I am *their music*. But it is not the worse for that. We both approve it highly. The other in Ezekiel does not seem quite so pat. The prophet complains that his word was to the people like a pleasant song, heard with delight, but soon forgotten. At the commemoration, I suppose that the word is nothing, but the music all in all. The Bible however will abundantly supply you with applicable passages. All passages indeed, that animadvert upon the profanation of God's house and worship, seem to present themselves upon the occasion.

Accept our love and best wishes; and believe me,
my dear friend, with warm and true affection,

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, July 27, 1785.

My dear William—You and your party left me in a frame of mind that indisposed me much to company. I comforted myself with the hope that I should spend a silent day, in which I should find abundant leisure to indulge sensations, which, though of the melancholy kind, I yet wished to nourish. But that hope proved vain. In less than an hour after your departure, Mr. — made his appearance at the green-house door. We were obliged to ask him to dinner, and he dined with us. He is an agreeable, sensible, well-bred young man, but with all his recommendations I felt that on that

occasion I could have spared him. So much better are the absent, whom we love much, than the present whom we love a little. I have however made myself amends since, and, nothing else having interfered, have sent many a thought after you.

You had been gone two days, when a violent thunder-storm came over us. I was passing out of the parlour into the hall, with Mungo at my heels, when a flash seemed to fill the room with fire. In the same instant came the clap, so that the explosion was, I suppose, perpendicular to the roof. Mungo's courage upon the tremendous occasion constrained me to smile, in spite of the solemn impression that such an event never fails to affect me with—the moment that he heard the thunder, (which was like the burst of a great gun) with a wrinkled forehead, and with eyes directed to the ceiling, whence the sound seemed to proceed, he barked; but he barked exactly in concert with the thunder. It thundered once, and he barked once, and so precisely the very instant when the thunder happened, that both sounds seemed to begin and end together. Some dogs will clap their tails close, and sneak into a corner at such a time, but Mungo it seems is of a more fearless family. A house at no great distance from ours was the mark to which the lightning was directed; it knocked down the chimney, split the building, and carried away the corner of the next house, in which lay a fellow drunk, and asleep upon his bed—it roused and terrified him, and he promises to get drunk no more; but I have seen a woeful end of many such

conversions. I remember but one such storm at Olney, since I have known the place, and I am glad that it did not happen two days sooner for the sake of the ladies, who would probably, one of them at least, have been alarmed by it. I have received, since you went, two very flattering letters of thanks, one from Mr. Bacon, and one from Mr. Barham, such as might make a lean poet plump and an humble poet proud. But, being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect they had than that they pleased me; and I communicate the intelligence to you not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also. We are now going to walk, and thus far I have written before I have received your letter.

Friday.—I must now be as compact as possible. When I began, I designed four sides, but, my packet being transformed into two single epistles, I can consequently afford you but three. I have filled a large sheet with animadversions upon Pope. I am proceeding in my translation—

“ Velis et remis, omnibus nervis,”

as Hudibras has it; and if God give me health and ability, will put it into your hands when I see you next. Mr. — has just left us. He has read my book, and, as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you the man has a very acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion.

Be not sorry that your love of Christ was ex-

cited in you by a picture. Could a dog or a cat suggest to me the thought that Christ is precious, I would not despise that thought, because a dog or a cat suggested it. The meanness of the instrument cannot debase the nobleness of the principle. He that kneels before a picture of Christ is an idolater. But he in whose heart the sight of a picture kindles a warm remembrance of the Saviour's sufferings, must be a Christian. Suppose that I dream, as Gardiner did, that Christ walks before me, that he turns and smiles upon me, and fills my soul with ineffable love and joy. Will a man tell me that I am deceived, that I ought not to love or rejoice in him for such a reason, because a dream is merely a picture drawn upon the imagination? I hold not with such divinity. To love Christ is the greatest dignity of man, be that affection wrought in him how it may.

Adieu! May the blessing of God be upon you all! It is your mother's heart's wish and mine.

Yours ever,

W. C.

The humble and unostentatious spirit and the fine tone of Christian feeling which pervade the following letter, impart to it a peculiar interest.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, August 6, 1785.

My dear Friend—I found your account of what

* Private Correspondence.

you experienced in your state of maiden authorship very entertaining, because very natural. I suppose that no man ever made his first sally from the press without a conviction that all eyes and ears would be engaged to attend him, at least, without a thousand anxieties lest they should not. But, however arduous and interesting such an enterprise may be in the first instance, it seems to me that our feelings on the occasion soon become obtuse. I can answer at least for one. Mine are by no means what they were when I published my first volume. I am even so indifferent to the matter, that I can truly assert myself guiltless of the very idea of my book sometimes whole days together. God knows that, my mind having been occupied more than twelve years in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects; the world, and its opinion of what I write, is become as unimportant to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush. Despair made amusement necessary, and I found poetry the most agreeable amusement. Had I not endeavoured to perform my best, it would not have amused me at all. The mere blotting of so much paper would have been but indifferent sport. God gave me grace also to wish that I might not write in vain. Accordingly I have mingled much truth with much trifle; and such truths as deserved at least to be clad as well and as handsomely as I could clothe them. If the world approve me not, so much the worse for them, but not for me. I have only endeavoured to serve them, and the loss will be their own. And as to their commendations, if I should chance to win

them, I feel myself equally invulnerable there. The view that I have had of myself, for many years, has been so truly humiliating, that I think the praises of all mankind could not hurt me. God knows that I speak my present sense of the matter at least most truly, when I say that the admiration of creatures like myself seems to me a weapon the least dangerous that my worst enemy could employ against me. I am fortified against it by such solidity of real self-abasement, that I deceive myself most egregiously if I do not heartily despise it. Praise belongeth to God; and I seem to myself to covet it no more than I covet divine honours. Could I assuredly hope that God would at last deliver me, I should have reason to thank him for all that I have suffered, were it only for the sake of this single fruit of my affliction—that it has taught me how much more contemptible I am in myself than I ever before suspected, and has reduced my former share of self-knowledge (of which at that time I had a tolerably good opinion) to a mere nullity, in comparison with what I have acquired since. Self is a subject of inscrutable misery and mischief, and can never be studied to so much advantage as in the dark; for as the bright beams of the sun seem to impart a beauty to the foulest objects, and can make even a dunghill smile, so the light of God's countenance, vouchsafed to a fallen creature, so sweetens him and softens him for the time, that he seems, both to others and to himself, to have nothing savage or sordid about him. *But the heart is a nest of ser-*

pents, and will be such whilst it continues to beat. If God cover the mouth of that nest with his hand, they are hush and snug; but if he withdraw his hand, the whole family lift up their heads and hiss, are as active and venemous as ever. This I always professed to believe from the time that I had embraced the truth, but never knew it as I know it now. To what end I have been made to know it as I do, whether for the benefit of others, or for my own, or for both, or for neither, will appear hereafter.

What I have written leads me naturally to the mention of a matter that I had forgot. I should blame nobody, not even my intimate friends, and those who have the most favourable opinion of me, were they to charge the publication of John Gilpin, at the end of so much solemn and serious truth, to the score of the author's vanity; and to suspect that, however sober I may be upon proper occasions, I have yet that itch of popularity that would not suffer me to sink my title to a jest that had been so successful. But the case is not such. When I sent the copy of "The Task" to Johnson, I desired, indeed, Mr. Unwin to ask him the question whether or not he would choose to make it a part of the volume? This I did merely with a view to promote the sale of it. Johnson answered, "By all means." Some months afterwards he enclosed a note to me in one of my packets, in which he expressed a change of mind, alleging, that to print John Gilpin would only be to print what had been hackneyed in every magazine, in every shop, and at the corner of

every street. I answered that I desired to be entirely governed by his opinion; and that if he chose to wave it, I should be better pleased with the omission. Nothing more passed between us upon the subject, and I concluded that I should never have the immortal honour of being generally known as the author of John Gilpin. In the last packet, however, down came John, very fairly printed, and equipped for public appearance. The business having taken this turn, I concluded that Johnson had adopted my original thought, that it might prove advantageous to the sale; and as he had had the trouble and expense of printing it, I corrected the copy, and let it pass. Perhaps, however, neither the book nor the writer may be made much more famous by John's good company than they would have been without it; for the volume has never yet been advertised, nor can I learn that Johnson intends it. He fears the expense, and the consequence must be prejudicial. Many who would purchase will remain uninformed: but I am perfectly content.

I have considered your motto, and like the purport of it; but the best, because the most laconic manner of it, seems to be this—

Cùm talis sis, sis noster;

utinam being, in my account of it, unnecessary.*

Yours, my dear friend, most truly,

W. C.

* The original passage is as follows:—

Cùm talis sis, utinam noster esses.

If intended, therefore, as a quotation, it should be quoted without alteration.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, August 17, 1785.

My dear Friend—I did very warmly and very sincerely thank Mr. Bacon for his most friendly and obliging letter; but, having written my acknowledgments in the cover, I suppose that they escaped your notice. I should not have contented myself with transmitting them through your hands, but should have addressed them immediately to himself, but that I foresaw plainly this inconvenience: that in writing to him on such an occasion, I must almost unavoidably make self and self's book the subject. Therefore it was, as Mrs. Unwin can vouch for me, that I denied myself that pleasure. I place this matter now in the van of all that I have to say: first, that you may not overlook it; secondly, because it is uppermost in my consideration; and thirdly, because I am impatient to be exculpated from the seeming omission.

You told me, I think, that you seldom read the papers. In our last we had an extract from Johnson's Diary, or whatever else he called it. It is certain that the publisher of it is neither much a friend to the cause of religion, nor to the author's memory; for, by the specimen of it that has reached us, it seems to contain only such stuff as has a direct tendency to expose both to ridicule. His prayers for the dead, and his minute account of the rigour with which he observed church fasts, whether he drank tea or coffee, whether with sugar or without and

* Private Correspondence.

whether one or two dishes of either, are the most important items to be found in this childish register of the great Johnson, supreme dictator in the chair of literature, and almost a driveller in his closet: a melancholy witness to testify how much of the wisdom of this world may consist with almost infantine ignorance of the affairs of a better. I remember a good man at Huntingdon, who, I doubt not, is now with God, and he also kept a Diary. After his death, through the neglect or foolish wantonness of his executors, it came abroad for the amusement of his neighbours. All the town saw it, and all the town found it highly diverting. It contained much more valuable matter than the poor Doctor's journal seems to do; but it contained also a faithful record of all his deliverances from wind, (for he was much troubled with flatulence,) together with pious acknowledgments of the mercy. There is certainly a call for gratitude, whatsoever benefit we receive; and it is equally certain that we ought to be humbled under the recollection of our least offences; but it would have been as well if neither my old friend had recorded his eructations, nor the Doctor his dishes of sugarless tea, or the dinner at which he ate too much. I wonder, indeed, that any man of such learned eminence as Johnson, who knew that every word he uttered was deemed oracular, and that every scratch of his pen was accounted a treasure, should leave behind him what he would have blushed to exhibit while he lived. If Virgil would have burnt his *Æneid*, how much more reason had these good men to have burnt their journals!

Mr. Perry will leave none such behind him. He is dying, as I suppose you have heard. Dr. Kerr, who I think has visited him twice or thrice, desired at his last visit to be no more sent for. He pronounced his case hopeless; for that his thigh and leg must mortify. He is however in a most comfortable frame of mind. So long as he thought it possible that he might recover, he was much occupied with a review of his ministry; and, under a deep impression of his deficiencies in that function, assured Mr. R—— that he intended, when he should enter upon it again, to be much more diligent than he had been. He was conscious, he said, that many fine things had been said of him; but that, though he trusted he had found grace so to walk as not to dishonour his office, he was conscious at the same time how little he deserved them. This, with much more to the same purport, passed on Sunday last. On Thursday, Mr. R—— was with him again; and at that time Mr. Perry knew that he must die. The rules and cautions that he had before prescribed to himself, he then addressed directly to his visitor. He exhorted him by all means to be earnest and affectionate in his applications to the unconverted, and not less solicitous to admonish the careless, with a head full of light, and a heart alienated from the ways of God; and those, no less, who being wise in their own conceit, were much occupied with matters above their reach, and very little with subjects of immediate and necessary concern. He added that he had received from God, during his illness, other views of sin than he had ever been favoured

with before ; and exhorted him by all means to be watchful. Mr. R—— being himself the reporter of these conversations, it is to be supposed that they impressed him. Admonitions from such lips, and in a dying time too, must have their weight ; and it is well with the hearer, when the instruction abides with him. But our own view of these matters is, I believe, that alone which can effectually serve us. The representations of a dying man may strike us at the time ; and, if they stir up in us a spirit of self-examination and inquiry, so that we rest not till we have made his views and experience our own, it is well ; otherwise, the wind that passes us is hardly sooner gone than the effect of the most serious exhortations.

Farewell, my friend. My views of my spiritual state are, as you say, altered ; but they are yet far from being such as they must be, before I can be enduringly comforted.

Yours unfeignedly,

W. C.

The Diary of Dr. Johnson, adverted to in the last letter, created both surprise and disappointment. The great moralist of the age there appears in his real character, distinct from that external splendour with which popular admiration always encircles the brow of genius. The portrait is drawn by his own hand. We cannot withhold our praise from the ingenuousness with which he discloses the secret recesses of his heart, and the fidelity with which conscience exercises its inquisi-

torial power over the life and actions, We are also affected by the deep humility, the confession of sin, and the earnest appeal for mercy, discernible in many of the prayers and meditations. But, viewed as a whole, this Diary creates painful feelings, and affords occasion for much reflection. If therefore we indulge in a few remarks, founded on some of the extracts, it is not to detract from the high fame of so distinguished a scholar, whom we consider to have enlarged the bounds of British literature, and to have acquired a lasting title to public gratitude and esteem, but to perform a solemn and conscientious duty.* We are now arrived at a period when it is high time to establish certain great and momentous truths in the public mind; and, among those that are of primary importance, to prove that Conversion is not a term but a principle; not the designation of a party but the enjoined precept of a Saviour; the evidence of our claim to the title of Christian; and indispensable to constitute our meetness for the enjoyment of heaven.

We now extract the following passages from the Diary of Dr. Johnson, with the intention of adding a few comments.

Easter-day, 1765.—“ Since the last Easter, I have

* “ If there is a regard due to the memory of the dead, there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth.”

“ It is the business of a biographer to pass lightly over those performances and actions which produce vulgar greatness; to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appearances are laid aside.”—*Rambler*, No. 60, vol. ii.

reformed no evil habit ; my time has been unprofitably spent, and seems as a dream, that has left nothing behind. My memory grows confused, and I know not how the days pass over me."

"I purpose to rise at eight, because, though I shall not yet rise early, it will be much earlier than I now rise, for I often lie till two ; and will gain me much time, and tend to a conquest over idleness, and give time for other duties."

Sept. 18, 1768.—"I have now begun the sixtieth year of my life. How the last year has past, I am unwilling to terrify myself with thinking."

Jan. 1, 1769.—"I am now about to begin another year : how the last has past it would be, in my state of weakness, perhaps not prudent too solicitously to recollect."

1772.—"I resolved last Easter to read, within the year, the whole Bible, a very great part of which I had never looked upon. I read the Greek Testament without construing, and this day concluded the Apocalypse. I think that no part was missed."

"My purpose of reading the rest of the Bible was forgotten, till I took by chance the resolutions of last Easter in my hand."

"I hope to read the whole Bible once a year, as long as I live."

April 26.—"It is a comfort to me, that at last, in my sixty-third year, I have attained to know, even thus hastily, confusedly, and imperfectly, what my Bible contains."

1775.—"Yesterday, I do not recollect that to go to church came into my thoughts ; but I sat in my

chamber preparing for preparation ; interrupted I know not how. I was near two hours at dinner."

1777.—"I have this year omitted church on most Sundays, intending to supply the deficiency in the week. So that *I owe twelve attendances on worship.*"

"When I look back upon resolutions of improvement and amendment, which have, year after year, been made and broken, either by negligence, forgetfulness, vicious idleness, casual interruption, or morbid infirmity ; when I find that so much of my life has stolen unprofitably away, and that I can descry, by retrospection, scarcely a few single days properly and vigorously employed, why do I yet try to resolve again ? I try, because reformation is necessary, and despair criminal ; I try in humble hope of the help of God."*

Our sole object, in the introduction of these extracts, is to found upon them an appeal to those who question the necessity of Conversion, in that higher sense and acceptation which implies an inward principle of grace, changing and transforming the heart. We would beg to ask whether it was not the want of the vital power and energy of this principle, that produced in Johnson the vacillation of mind and purpose, which we have just recorded ; the hours lost ; the resolutions broken ; the sabbaths violated ; and the sacred volume not read, till the shades of evening advanced upon him ? What instance can be adduced that more clearly demonstrates the insufficiency of the highest acquirements of human learning, and that nothing but a

* See Diary of Dr. Johnson.

Divine power can illuminate the mind, and convert the heart? Happily, Johnson is known to have at length found what he needed, and to have died with a hope full of immortality.*

But we would go further. We maintain that all men, without respect of character or person, need conversion; for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" all partake of the corruption and infirmities of a fallen nature, and inherit the primeval curse. Shall reason, shall philosophy effect the cure? Reason sees what is right; erring nature, in despite of reason, follows what is wrong. Philosophy can penetrate into the abstrusest mysteries, ascertain by what laws the universe is governed, and trace the heavenly bodies in their courses, but cannot eradicate one evil passion from the soul. Where then lies the remedy? The Gospel reveals it. And what is the Gospel? The Gospel is a dispensation of grace and mercy, for the recovery of fallen man, *and the application of this remedy to the heart and conscience effects that Conversion of which we are speaking.* But by whom or by what applied? By Him who holds "the keys of heaven and of hell," who "openeth, and no man shutteth," and whose prerogative it is to say, "Behold, I make all things new."† And how? By his word, and by his Spirit. "He sent *his word* and healed them."‡ "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by *the word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever."§ The word is the appointed instrument, the

* See vol. ii. p. 269—271.

† Rev. xxi. 5.

‡ Psal. cvii. 20.

§ 1 Pet. i. 23. See also Heb. iv. 12.

Spirit, the mighty agent which gives the quickening power : * not by any supernatural revelation, but in the ordinary operations of divine grace, and consistently with the freedom and co-operation of man as a moral agent ; speaking pardon and peace to the conscience, and delivering from the tyranny of sense and the slavery of fear, by proclaiming “ liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”

The last subject for reflection suggested by the Diary of Dr. Johnson, is the frequent neglect of the Sabbath, and his confession that *he had lived a stranger to the greater part of the contents of his Bible till the sixty-third year of his age.* This is an afflicting record, and we notice the fact, from a deep conviction that piety can never retain its power and ascendancy in the heart, where the Bible is not read, and the ordinances of God are frequently neglected. When will genius learn that its noblest attribute is to light its fires at the lamp of divine truth, and that the union of piety and learning is the highest perfection of our nature ? We beg to commend to the earnest attention of the student the following eloquent testimony to the sacred volume from the pen of Sir William Jones.

“I have carefully and regularly perused these Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that the Volume, independently of its divine origin, contains more subli-

* “ It is the Spirit that quickeneth.” John vi. 63. The union of the Word and the Spirit in imparting spiritual life to the soul is forcibly expressed in the same verse : “ The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.”

mity, purer morality, more important history, and finer strains of eloquence, than can be collected from all other books, in whatever language they may have been written." *

Having quoted Sir William Jones's testimony, we conclude by urging his example.

" Before thy mystic altar, heavenly Truth,
I kneel in manhood, as I knelt in youth :
'Thus let me kneel, till this dull form decay,
And life's last shade be brighten'd by thy ray.
Then shall my soul, now lost in clouds below,
Soar without bound, without consuming glow.' †

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, August 27, 1785.

My dear Friend—I was low in spirits yesterday when your parcel came and raised them. Every proof of attention and regard to a man who lives in a vinegar-bottle is welcome from his friends on the outside of it ; accordingly your books were welcome, (you must not forget, by the way, that I want the original, of which you have sent me the translation only,) and the ruffles from Miss Shuttleworth most welcome. I am covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees, whom I highly value and esteem, and consequently felt myself much gratified by her very obliging present. I have had more comfort, far more comfort, in the connexions that I have formed within the last twenty

* See Lord Teignmouth's Life of Sir William Jones.

† Ibid.

years, than in the more numerous ones that I had before.

Memorandum.—The latter are almost all Unwins or Unwinisms.

You are entitled to my thanks also for the facetious engravings of John Gilpin. A serious poem is like a swan: it flies heavily and never far; but a jest has the wings of a swallow that never tire, and that carry it into every nook and corner. I am perfectly a stranger however to the reception that, my volume meets with, and, I believe, in respect of my *nonchalance* upon that subject, if authors would but copy so fair an example, am a most exemplary character. I must tell you nevertheless that, although the laurels that I gain at Olney will never minister much to my pride, I have acquired some. The Rev. Mr. Scott is my admirer, and thinks my second volume superior to my first. It ought to be so. If we do not improve by practice, then nothing can mend us; and a man has no more cause to be mortified at being told that he has excelled himself, than the elephant had, whose praise it was that he was the greatest elephant in the world, himself excepted.

If it be fair to judge of a book by an extract, I do not wonder that you were so little edified by Johnson's Journal. It is even more ridiculous than was poor —'s, of flatulent memory. The portion of it given to us in this day's paper contains not one sentiment worth one farthing except the last, in which he resolves to bind himself with no more unbidden obligations. Poor man! one would think that to pray for his dead wife, and to pinch himself with

church-fasts had been almost the whole of his religion. I am sorry that he who was so manly an advocate for the cause of virtue in all other places was so childishly employed, and so superstitiously too, in his closet. Had he studied his Bible more, to which by his own confession he was in great part a stranger, he had known better what use to make of his retired hours, and had trifled less. His lucubrations of this sort have rather the appearance of religious dotage than of any vigorous exertions towards God. It will be well if the publication prove not hurtful in its effects, by exposing the best cause, already too much despised, to ridicule still more profane. On the other side of the same paper, I find a long string of aphorisms, and maxims, and rules for the conduct of life, which, though they appear not with his name, are so much in his manner, with the above-mentioned, that I suspect them for his. I have not read them all, but several of them I read that were trivial enough : for the sake of one however I forgive him the rest—he advises never to banish hope entirely, because it is the cordial of life, although it be the greatest flatterer in the world. Such a measure of hope as may not endanger my peace by a disappointment I would wish to cherish upon every subject in which I am interested : but there lies the difficulty. A cure however, and the only one, for all the irregularities of hope and fear, is found in submission to the will of God. Happy they that have it !

This last sentence puts me in mind of your reference to Blair in a former letter, whom you there permitted to be your arbiter to adjust the respective

claims of *who* or *that*. I do not rashly differ from so great a grammarian, nor do at any rate differ from him altogether—upon solemn occasions, as in prayer or preaching, for instance, I would be strictly correct, and upon stately ones; for instance, were I writing an epic poem, I would be so likewise, but not upon familiar occasions. God, *who* heareth prayer, is right: Hector, *who* saw Patroclus, is right: and the man, *that* dresses me every day, is in my mind right also; because the contrary would give an air of stiffness and pedantry to an expression that, in respect of the matter of it, cannot be too negligently made up.

Adieu, my dear William! I have scribbled with all my might, which, breakfast-time excepted, has been my employment ever since I rose, and it is now past one.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Sept. 24, 1785.

My dear Friend—I am sorry than an excursion, which you would otherwise have found so agreeable, was attended with so great a drawback upon its pleasures as Miss Cunningham's illness must needs have been. Had she been able to bathe in the sea, it might have been of service to her, but I knew her weakness and delicacy of habit to be such as did not

* Private Correspondence.

encourage any very sanguine hopes that the regimen would suit her. I remember Southampton well, having spent much time there ; but, though I was young, and had no objections on the score of conscience either to dancing or cards, I never was in the assembly-room in my life. I never was fond of company, and especially disliked it in the country. A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fire-side, had always more charms for me than any other amusement that the place afforded. I was also a sailor, and, being of Sir Thomas Hesketh's party, who was himself born one, was often pressed into the service. But, though I gave myself an air and wore trowsers, I had no genuine right to that honour, disliking much to be occupied in great waters, unless in the finest weather. How they continue to elude the wearisomeness that attends a sea life, who take long voyages, you know better than I ; but, for my own part, I seldom have sailed so far as from Hampton river to Portsmouth without feeling the confinement irksome, and sometimes to a degree that was almost insupportable. There is a certain perverseness, of which I believe all men have a share, but of which no man has a larger share than I—I mean that temper, or humour, or whatever it is to be called, that indisposes us to a situation, though not unpleasant in itself, merely because we cannot get out of it. I could not endure the room in which I now write, were I conscious that the door were locked. In less than five minutes I should feel myself a prisoner, though I can spend hours in it under an assurance

that I may leave it when I please without experiencing any tedium at all. It was for this reason, I suppose, that the yacht was always disagreeable to me. Could I have stepped out of it into a corn-field or a garden, I should have liked it well enough, but, being surrounded with water, I was as much confined in it as if I had been surrounded by fire, and did not find that it made me any adequate compensation for such an abridgement of my liberty. I make little doubt but Noah was glad when he was enlarged from the ark; and we are sure that Jonah was, when he came out of the fish; and so was I to escape from the good sloop the Harriet.

In my last, I wrote you word that Mr. Perry was given over by his friends, and pronounced a dead man by his physician. Just when I had reached the end of the foregoing paragraph, he came in. His errand hither was to bring two letters, which I enclose; one is to yourself, in which he will give you, I doubt not, such an account both of his body and mind, as will make all that I might say upon those subjects superfluous. The only consequences of his illness seem to be that he looks a little pale, and that, though always a most excellent man, he is still more angelic than he was. Illness sanctified is better than health. But I know a man who has been a sufferer by a worse illness than his, almost these fourteen years, and who at present is only the worse for it.

Mr. Scott called upon us yesterday; he is much inclined to set up a Sunday school, if he can raise a fund for the purpose. Mr. Jones has had one some

time at Clifton, and Mr. Unwin writes me word that he has been thinking of nothing else, day and night, for a fortnight. It is a wholesome measure that seems to bid fair to be pretty generally adopted, and, for the good effects that it promises, deserves well to be so. I know not, indeed, while the spread of the gospel continues so limited as it is, how a reformation of manners in the lower class of mankind can be brought to pass; or by what other means the utter abolition of all principle among them, moral as well as religious, can possibly be prevented. Heathenish parents can only bring up heathenish children; an assertion nowhere oftener or more clearly illustrated than at Olney; where children, seven years of age, infest the streets every evening with curses and with songs, to which it would be unseemly to give their proper epithet. Such urchins as these could not be so diabolically accomplished, unless by the connivance of their parents. It is well indeed if, in some instances, their parents be not themselves their instructors. Judging by their proficiency, one can hardly suppose any other. It is therefore doubtless an act of the greatest charity to snatch them out of such hands, before the inveteracy of the evil shall have made it desperate. Mr. Teedon, I should imagine, will be employed as a teacher, should this expedient be carried into effect. I know not at least that we have any other person among us so well qualified for the service. He is indisputably a Christian man, and miserably poor, whose revenues need im-

provement, as much as any children in the world can possibly need instruction.

Believe me, my dear friend,
With true affection, yours,

W. C.

The first establishment of Sunday schools in England, which commenced about this time, is too important an era to be passed over in silence. The founder of this system, so beneficial in its consequences to the rising generation, was Robert Raikes, Esq., of Gloucester, and from whose lips the writer once received the history of their first institution. He had observed, in going to divine worship on the Sabbath, that the streets were generally filled with groups of idle and ragged children, playing and blaspheming in a manner that showed their utter unconsciousness of the sacred obligations of that day. The thought suggested itself, that, if these children could be collected together, and the time so misapplied be devoted to instruction and attendance at the house of God, a happy change might be effected in their life and conduct. He consulted the clergyman of the parish, who encouraged the attempt. A respectable and pious female was immediately selected, and twelve children, who were shortly afterwards decently clothed, were placed under her care. Rules and regulations were formed, and the school opened and closed with prayer. The ignorant were taught to read, the word of God was introduced, and the children walked in orderly procession to church.

The visible improvement in their moral habits, and their proficiency in learning, led to an extension of the plan. The principal inhabitants of the town became interested in its success, and in a short time the former noisy inmates of the streets were found uniting in the accents of prayer and praise in the temple of Jehovah. The example manifested by the city of Gloucester soon attracted public attention. The queen of George the Third requested to be furnished with the history and particulars of the undertaking, and was so impressed with its importance as to distinguish it by her sanction. The result is well known. Sunday schools are now universally established, and have been adopted in Europe, in America, and wherever the traces of civilisation are to be discerned. Their sound has gone forth into all lands, and, so long as knowledge is necessary to piety, and both constitute the grace and ornament of the young and the safeguard of society, the venerable name of Raikes will be enrolled with gratitude among the friends and benefactors of mankind.*

* The editor, once conversing with the late Rev. Andrew Fuller, the well-known secretary of the Serampore Missionary Society, on the subject of Sunday schools in connexion with that noble institution, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the latter observed, "Yes: if the Bible Society had commenced its operations earlier, its usefulness would have been comparatively limited, because the faculty of reading would not have been so generally acquired. Each institution is in the order of Providence:—God first raised up Sunday schools, and children were thereby taught to read; afterwards, when this faculty was obtained, in order that it might not be per-

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Oct. 11, 1785.

My dear Sir—You began your letter with an apology for long silence, and it is now incumbent upon me to do the same; and the rather, as your kind invitation to Wargrave entitled you to a speedier answer. The truth is that I am become, if not a man of business, yet a busy man, and have been engaged almost this twelvemonth in a work that will allow of no long interruption. On this account it was impossible for me to accept your obliging summons; and, having only to tell you that I could not, it appeared to me as a matter of no great moment whether you received that intelligence soon or late.

You do me justice when you ascribe my printed epistle to you to my friendship for you; though, in fact, it was equally owing to the opinion that I have of yours for me.† Having, in one part or other of verted to wrong ends, God raised up the Bible Society, that the best of all possible books might be put into their hands. Yes, Sir," he added in his emphatic manner, "the wisdom of God is visible in both; they fit each other like hand and glove."

* Private Correspondence.

† The epistle in which he commemorates his friendship for Mr. Hill begins as follows:—

"Dear Joseph—Five-and-twenty years ago—

Alas, how time escapes! 'tis even so—" &c. &c.

We add the two concluding lines, as descriptive of his person and character.

"An honest man, close button'd to the chin,
Broad cloth without, and a warm heart within."

See *Poems*.

my two volumes, distinguished by name the majority of those few for whom I entertain a friendship, it seemed to me that it would be unjustifiable negligence to omit yourself; and, if I took that step without communicating to you my intention, it was only to gratify myself the more with the hope of surprising you agreeably. Poets are dangerous persons to be acquainted with, especially if a man have that in his character that promises to shine in verse. To that very circumstance it is owing that you are now figuring away in mine. For, notwithstanding what you say on the subject of honesty and friendship, that they are not splendid enough for public celebration, I must still think of them as I did before,—that there are no qualities of the mind and heart that can deserve it better. I can, at least for my own part, look round about upon the generality, and, while I see them deficient in those grand requisites of a respectable character, am not able to discover that they possess any other of value enough to atone for the want of them.

I beg that you will present my respects to Mrs. Hill, and believe me

Ever affectionately yours,

W. C.

The period at which we are now arrived, was marked by the renewal of an intimacy, long suspended indeed, but which neither time nor circumstances could efface from the affectionate heart of Cowper. The person to whom we allude is Lady Hesketh, a near relative of the poet, and whose name

has already appeared in the early part of his history.

Their intercourse had been frequent, and endeared by reciprocal esteem in their youthful years; but the vicissitudes of life had separated them far from each other. During Cowper's long retirement, his accomplished cousin had passed some years with her husband abroad, and others, after her return, in a variety of mournful duties. She was at this time a widow, and her indelible regard for her poetical relation being agreeably stimulated by the publication of his recent works, she wrote to him, on that occasion, a very affectionate letter.

It gave rise to many from him, which we shall now introduce to the notice of the reader, because they give a minute account of their amiable author, at a very interesting period of his life; and because they reflect lustre on his character and genius in various points of view, and cannot fail to inspire the conviction that his letters are rivals to his poems, in the rare excellence of representing life and nature with graceful and endearing fidelity.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Oct. 12, 1785.

My dear Cousin—It is no new thing with you to give pleasure. But I will venture to say that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the

table a letter franked by my uncle,* and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—"This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returned." You perceive, therefore, that you judged well, when you conjectured that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than as in fact it proved—a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years nor interrupted intercourse have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value; if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment. But I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times too when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with

* Ashley Cowper, Esq.

you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply as to fear no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas ; I should remember him indeed at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself, but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance,) and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof that he could give of a judgment that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me; that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true ; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been, for thirteen of those years, in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary ; an attention and a care that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject ; it would be cruel to particularize only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to

the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much. But to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy for the most part are parents who have daughters. Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear Cousin, dejection of spirits which (I suppose) may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write therefore generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer, at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay and the winters also I have seldom left it, except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never I believe a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved Cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.

Yours, my dear friend and Cousin,

W. C.

The letters addressed to Mr. Newton by Cowper are frequently characterised by a plaintiveness of feeling that powerfully awakens the emotions of the heart. The following contains some incidental allusions of this kind.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Oct. 16, 1785.

My dear Friend—To have sent a child to heaven is a great honour and a great blessing, and your feelings on such an occasion may well be such as render you rather an object of congratulation than of condolence. And were it otherwise, yet, having yourself free access to all the sources of genuine consolation, I feel that it would be little better than impertinence in me to suggest any. An escape from a life of suffering to a life of happiness and glory is such a deliverance as leaves no room for the sorrow of survivors, unless they sorrow for themselves. We cannot, indeed, lose what we love without regretting it; but a Christian is in possession of such alleviations of that regret as the world knows nothing of. Their beloveds, when they die, go they know not whither; and if they suppose them, as they

* Private Correspondence.

generally do, in a state of happiness, they have yet but an indifferent prospect of joining them in that state hereafter. But it is not so with you. You both know whither your beloved is gone, and you know that you shall follow her; and you know also that in the mean time she is incomparably happier than yourself. So far, therefore, as she is concerned, nothing has come to pass but what was most fervently to be wished. I do not know that I am singularly selfish; but one of the first thoughts that your account of Miss Cunningham's dying moments and departure suggested to me had self for its object. It struck me that she was not born when I sank into darkness, and that she is gone to heaven before I have emerged again. What a lot, said I to myself, is mine! whose helmet is fallen from my head, and whose sword from my hand, in the midst of the battle; who was stricken down to the earth when I least expected it; who had just begun to cry victory! when I was defeated myself; and who have been trampled upon so long, that others have had time to conquer and to receive their crown, before I have been able to make one successful effort to escape from under the feet of my enemies. It seemed to me, therefore, that if you mourned for Miss Cunningham you gave those tears to her to which I only had a right, and I was almost ready to exclaim, "I am the dead, and not she; you misplace your sorrows." I have sent you the history of my mind on this subject without any disguise; if it does not please you, pardon it at least, for it is the truth. The unhappy, I believe, are always selfish. I have, I confess, my comfortable

moments; but they are like the morning dew, so suddenly do they pass away and are gone.

It should seem a matter of small moment to me, who never hear him, whether Mr. Scott shall be removed from Olney to the Lock, or no; yet, in fact, I believe that few interest themselves more in that event than I. He knows my manner of life, and has ceased long since to wonder at it. A new minister would need information, and I am not ambitious of having my tale told to a stranger. He would also perhaps think it necessary to assail me with arguments, which would be more profitably disposed of, if he should discharge them against the walls of a tower. I wish, therefore, for the continuance of Mr. Scott. He honoured me so far as to consult me twice upon the subject. At our first interview, he seemed to discern but little in the proposal that entitled it to his approbation. But, when he came the second time, we observed that his views of it were considerably altered. He was warm—he was animated; difficulties had disappeared, and allurements had started up in their place. I could not say to him, Sir, you are naturally of a sanguine temper; and he that is so cannot too much distrust his own judgment;—but I am glad that he will have the benefit of yours. It seems to me, however, that the minister who shall re-illumine the faded glories of the Lock must not only practise great fidelity in his preaching, to which task Mr. Scott is perfectly equal, but must do it with much address; and it is hardly worth while to observe that his excellence does not lie that way,

because he is ever ready to acknowledge it himself. But I have nothing to suggest upon this subject that will be new to you, and therefore drop it; the rather, indeed, because I may reasonably suppose that by this time the point is decided.

I have reached that part of my paper which I generally fill with intelligence, if I can find any: but there is a great dearth of it at present; and Mr. Scott has probably anticipated me in all the little that there is. Lord P—— having dismissed Mr. Jones from his service, the people of Turvey* have burnt him [Mr. Jones] in effigy, with a bundle of quick-thorn† under his arm. What consequences are to follow his dismissal is uncertain. His lordship threatens him with a lawsuit; and, unless their disputes can be settled by arbitration, it is not unlikely that the profits of poor Jones's stewardship will be melted down at Westminster. He has laboured hard, and no doubt with great integrity, and has been rewarded with hard words and scandalous treatment.

Mr. Scott (which perhaps he may not have told

* The Peterborough family had formerly a mansion and large estate in the parish of Turvey. It is mentioned in Camden's *Britannia*, so far back as in the time of Henry VIII. There are some marble monuments in the parish church, executed with great magnificence, and in high preservation, recording the heroes of former times belonging to that ancient but now extinct race.

† The dispute originated respecting the enclosure of the parish; and, as this act was unpopular with the poor, the bundle of quick-thorn was intended to be expressive of their indignant feelings.

you, for he did not mention it here) has met with similar treatment at a place in this country called Hinksey, or by some such name.* But he suffered in effigy for the Gospel's sake ;—a cause in which I presume he would not be unwilling, if need were, to be burnt *in propria personâ*.

I have nothing to add, but that we are well, and remember you with much affection; and that I am, my dear friend,

Sincerely yours,

W. C.

The following letters communicate various interesting particulars respecting Cowper's laborious undertaking, the new version of Homer's Iliad.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Oct. 22, 1785.

My dear William—You might well suppose that your letter had miscarried, though in fact it was duly received. I am not often so long in arrear, and you may assure yourself that when at any time it happens that I am so, neither neglect nor idleness is the cause. I have, as you well know, a daily occupation, forty lines to translate, a task which I never excuse myself, when it is possible to perform it. Equally sedulous I am in the matter of transcribing, so that between both my morning and evening are most part completely engaged. Add to this that, though my spirits are seldom so bad but I can

* The proper name of the place is Tingewick.

write verse, they are often at so low an ebb as to make the production of a letter impossible. So much for a trespass, which called for some apology, but for which to apologize further would be a greater trespass still.

I am now in the twentieth book of Homer, and shall assuredly proceed, because the further I go the more I find myself justified in the undertaking; and in due time, if I live, shall assuredly publish. In the whole I shall have composed about forty thousand verses, about which forty thousand verses I shall have taken great pains, on no occasion suffering a slovenly line to escape me. I leave you to guess therefore whether, such a labour once achieved, I shall not determine to turn it to some account, and to gain myself profit if I can, if not at least some credit for my reward.

I perfectly approve of your course with John. The most entertaining books are best to begin with, and none in the world, so far as entertainment is concerned, deserves the preference to Homer. Neither do I know that there is any where to be found Greek of easier construction — poetical Greek I mean; and as for prose, I should recommend Xenophon's *Cyropædia*. That also is a most amusing narrative, and ten times easier to understand than the crabbed epigrams and scribblements of the minor poets that are generally put into the hands of boys. I took particular notice of the neatness of John's Greek character, which (let me tell you) deserves its share of commendation; for to write

the language legibly is not the lot of every man who can read it. Witness myself for one.

I like the little ode of Huntingford's that you sent me. In such matters we do not expect much novelty, or much depth of thought. The expression is all in all, which to me at least appears to be faultless.

Adieu, my dear William! We are well, and you and yours are ever the objects of our affection.

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Nov. 5, 1785.

My dear Friend—Were it with me as in days past, you should have no cause to complain of my tardiness in writing. You supposed that I would have accepted your packet as an answer to my last; and so indeed I did, and felt myself overpaid; but, though a debtor, and deeply indebted too, had not wherewithal to discharge the arrear. You do not know nor suspect what a conquest I sometimes gain, when I only take up the pen with a design to write. Many a time have I resolved to say to all my few correspondents,—I take my leave of you for the present; if I live to see better days, you shall hear from me again.—I have been driven to the very verge of this measure; and even upon this occasion was upon the point of desiring Mrs. Unwin to become my substitute. She indeed offered to write

* Private Correspondence.

in my stead ; but, fearing that you would understand me to be even worse than I am, I rather chose to answer for myself.—So much for a subject with which I could easily fill the sheet, but with which I have occupied too great a part of it already. It is time that I should thank you, and return you Mrs. Unwin's thanks for your Narrative.* I told you in my last in what manner I felt myself affected by the abridgement of it contained in your letter ; and have therefore only to add, upon that point, that the impression made upon me by the relation at large was of a like kind. I envy all that live in the enjoyment of a good hope, and much more all who die to enjoy the fruit of it : but I recollect myself in time ; I resolved not to touch that chord again, and yet was just going to trespass upon my resolution. As to the rest, your history of your happy niece is just what it should be,—clear, affectionate, and plain ; worthy of her, and worthy of yourself. How much more beneficial to the world might such a memorial of an unknown but pious and believing child eventually prove, would the supercilious learned condescend to read it, than the history of all the kings and heroes that ever lived ! But the world has its objects of admiration, and God has objects of his love. Those make a noise and perish ; and these weep silently for a short season, and live for ever. I had rather have been your niece, or the writer of her story, than any Cæsar that ever thundered.

* The Narrative of Miss Eliza Cunningham's last illness and happy death.

The vanity of human attainments was never so conspicuously exemplified as in the present day. The sagacious moderns make discoveries, which, how useful they may prove to themselves I know not; certainly they do no honour to the ancients. Homer and Virgil have enjoyed (if the dead have any such enjoyments) an unrivalled reputation as poets, through a long succession of ages. but it is now shrewdly suspected that Homer did not compose the poems for which he has been so long applauded;* and it is even asserted by a certain Robert Heron, Esq., that Virgil never wrote a line worth reading. He is a pitiful plagiarist; he is a servile imitator, a bungler in his plan, and has not a thought in his whole work that will bear examination. In short, he is any thing but what the literati for two thousand years have taken him to be—a man of genius and a fine writer. I fear that Homer's case is desperate. After the lapse of so many generations, it would be a difficult matter to elucidate a question which time and modern ingenuity together combine to puzzle. And I suppose that it were in vain for an honest plain man to inquire, if Homer did not write the *Iliad* and the

* In the *Prolegomena* to Villoissson's *Iliad* it is stated, that Pisistratus, in collecting the works of Homer, was imposed upon by spurious imitations of the Grecian bard's style; and that not suspecting the fraud, he was led to incorporate them as the genuine productions of Homer.

Cowper justly ridicules so extravagant a supposition.

Odyssey, who did? The answer would undoubtedly be—it is no matter; he did not: which is all that I undertook to prove. For Virgil, however, there still remains some consolation. The very same Mr. Heron, who finds no beauties in the *Æneid*, discovers not a single instance of the sublime in Scripture. Particularly he says, speaking of the prophets, that Ezekiel, although the filthiest of all writers, is the best of them. He, therefore, being the first of the learned who has reprobated even the style of the Scriptures, may possibly make the fewer proselytes to his judgment of the Heathen writer. For my own part at least, had I been accustomed to doubt whether the *Æneid* were a noble composition or not, this gentleman would at once have decided the question for me; and I should have been immediately assured that a work must necessarily abound in beauties that had the happiness to displease a censorer of the Word of God. What enterprises will not an inordinate passion for fame suggest? It prompted one man to fire the Temple of Ephesus; another, to fling himself into a volcano; and now has induced this wicked and unfortunate Squire either to deny his own feelings, or to publish to all the world that he has no feelings at all.*

* The playful spirit in which the writer adverts to this subject appears to have yielded afterwards to a feeling of indignation; the following lines in his own hand-writing having been found by Dr. Johnson amongst his papers:—

ON THE AUTHOR OF LETTERS ON LITERATURE.

The Genius of th' Augustan age

His head among Rome's ruins rear'd,

Mr. Scott is pestered with anonymous letters, but he conducts himself wisely; and the question whether he shall go to the Lock or not, seems hasting to a decision in the affirmative.

We are tolerably well; and Mrs. Unwin adds to mine her affectionate remembrances of yourself and Mrs. Newton.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

The work of Mr. Heron is entitled, "Letters on Literature," in which he spares neither things sacred nor profane. The author seems to be a man of talent, but it is talent painfully misapplied. After calling Virgil a servile imitator of Homer, and indulging in various critiques, he thus concludes his animadversions. "Such is the *Æneid*, which the author, with good reason, on his death-bed, condemned to the flames; and, had it suffered that fate, real poetry would have lost nothing by it. I have said that, notwithstanding all, Virgil deserves

And, bursting with heroic rage,
When literary Heron appear'd,

Thou hast, he cried, like him of old
Who set th' Ephesian dome on fire,
By being scandalously bold,
Attain'd the mark of thy desire.

And for traducing Virgil's name
Shalt share his merited reward;
A perpetuity of fame,
That rots, and stinks, and is abhorr'd.

his fame; for his fame is now confined to schools and academies; and his style (the pickle that has preserved his mummy from corruption) is pure and exquisite."

Wit, employed at the expense of taste and sound judgment, can neither advance the reputation of its author, nor promote the cause of true literature. This supercilious treatment of the noble productions of classic genius too much resembles that period in the literary history of France, when the question was agitated (with Perrault at its head) as to the relative superiority of the ancients or moderns. It was at that time fashionable with one of the contending parties to decry the pretensions of the ancients. One of their writers exclaims,

" Dépouillons ces respects serviles
Que nous portons aux temps passés.
Les Homères et les Virgiles
Peuvent encore être effacés."—LA MOTTE.

We trust that this corrupt spirit will never infect the Lyceums of British literature; but that they will be reserved ever to be the sanctuaries of high-taught genius, chastened by a refined and discriminating taste, and embellished with the graces of a simple and noble eloquence, formed on the pure models of classic antiquity.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.*

Olney, Nov. 7, 1785.

My dear Friend—Your time being so much occupied as to leave you no opportunity for a word more than the needful, I am the more obliged to you that you have found leisure even for that, and thank you for the note above acknowledged.

I know not at present what subject I could enter upon, by which I should not put you to an expense of moments that you can ill spare: I have often been displeased when a neighbour of mine, being himself an idle man, has delivered himself from the burthen of a vacant hour or two, by coming to repose his idleness upon me. Not to incur therefore and deservedly the blame that I have charged upon him, by interrupting you, who are certainly a busy man, whatever may be the case with myself, I shall only add that I am, with my respects to Mrs. Hill,

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

The tried stability of Cowper's friendship, after a long interval of separation, and the delicacy with which he accepts Lady Hesketh's offer of pecuniary aid, are here depicted in a manner that reflects honour on both parties.

* Private Correspondence.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Nov. 9, 1785.

My dearest Cousin—Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer, two days sooner than the post will serve me. I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste with which you both relish what you like, and, after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But, above all, I honour John Gilpin, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am now indebted to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts to, the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me ines-

timable. My benevolent and generous Cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted any thing, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply, yes. Whensoever and whatsoever, and in what manner soever you please; and add moreover that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced, and not much exceed my own; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when

it was best, it would not have enabled me to live as my connexions demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time, by the help of good management and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved Cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing, you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.

In the affair of my next publication,* toward which you also offer me so kindly your assistance, there will be no need that you should help me in the manner that you propose. It will be a large work, consisting I should imagine of six volumes at least. The 12th of this month I shall have spent a year upon it, and it will cost me more than another. I do not love the booksellers well enough to make them a present of such a labour, but intend to publish by subscription. Your vote and interest, my dear Cousin, upon the occasion, if you please, but nothing more! I will trouble you with some papers of proposals when the time shall come, and am sure that you will circulate as many for me as you can.

* His translation of Homer's Iliad.

Now, my dear, I am going to tell you a secret. It is a great secret, that you must not whisper even to your cat. No creature is at this moment apprized of it but Mrs. Unwin and her son. I am making a new translation of Homer, and am on the point of finishing the twenty-first book of the *Iliad*. The reasons upon which I undertake this Herculean labour, and by which I justify an enterprise in which I seem so effectually anticipated by Pöpe, although in fact he has not anticipated me at all, I may possibly give you, if you wish for them, when I can find nothing more interesting to say. A period which I do not conceive to be very near! I have not answered many things in your letter, nor can do it at present for want of room. I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done. There is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years. I am not indeed grown grey so much as I am grown bald. No matter. There was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me. Accordingly having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black riband about my neck, continues to me the

charms of my youth, even on the verge of age.
Away with the fear of writing too often.

W. C.

P. S.—That the view I give you of myself may be complete I add the two following items—That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

There is no date to the following letter, but it evidently refers to this period of time.

TO LADY HESKETH.

My dearest Cousin—I am glad that I always loved you as I did. It releases me from any occasion to suspect that my present affection for you is indebted for its existence to any selfish considerations. No, I am sure I love you disinterestedly and for your own sake, because I never thought of you with any other sensations than those of the truest affection, even while I was under the persuasion that I should never hear from you again. But, with my present feelings superadded to those that I always had for you, I find it no easy matter to do justice to my sensations. I perceive myself in a state of mind similar to that of the traveller described in Pope's *Messiah*, who, as he passes through a sandy desert, starts at the sudden and unexpected sound of a waterfall.* You have placed me in a situation new to

* The following is the passage alluded to :—

“The swain in barren deserts with surprise
Sees lilies spring, and sudden verdure rise ;
And starts, amidst the thirsty wilds, to hear
New falls of water murm'ring in his ear.”

Pope's Messiah, line 67, &c.

me, and in which I feel myself somewhat puzzled how to behave. At the same time I would not grieve you by putting a check upon your bounty, I would be as careful not to abuse it, as if I were a miser, and the question not about your money but my own.

Although I do not suspect that a secret to you, my Cousin, is any burthen, yet, having maturely considered that point since I wrote my last, I feel myself altogether disposed to release you from the injunction to that effect under which I laid you. I have now made such a progress in my translation that I need neither fear that I shall stop short of the end nor that any other rider of Pegasus should overtake me. Therefore, if at any time it should fall fairly in your way, or you should feel yourself invited to say I am so occupied, you have my poet-ship's free permission. Dr. Johnson read and recommended my first volume.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.*

Olney, Nov. 9, 1785.

My dear Friend—You desired me to return your good brother the bishop's Charge,† as soon as I

* Cowper was at Westminster school with five brothers of this name. He retained through life the friendship of the estimable character to whom this letter is addressed.

† Lewis Bagot, D.D. He was formerly Dean of Christ Church, Oxford; afterwards Bishop of Norwich, and finally Bishop of St. Asaph.

conveniently could, and the weather having forbidden us to hope for the pleasure of seeing you and Mrs. Bagot with you this morning, I return it now, lest, as you told me that your stay in this country would be short, you should be gone before it could reach you.

I wish as you do, that the Charge in question could find its way into all the parsonages in the nation. It is so generally applicable, and yet so pointedly enforced, that it deserves the most extensive spread. I find in it the happiest mixture of spiritual authority, the meekness of a Christian, and the good manners of a gentleman. It has convinced me that the poet who, like myself, shall take the liberty to pay the author of such valuable admonition a compliment, shall do at least as much honour to himself as to his subject.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Dec. 3, 1785.

My dear Friend—I am glad to hear that there is such a demand for your last Narrative. If I may judge of their general utility by the effect that they have heretofore had upon me, there are few things more edifying than death-bed memoirs. They

* Private Correspondence.

interest every reader, because they speak of a period at which all must arrive, and afford a solid ground of encouragement to survivors to expect the same, or similar, support and comfort, when it shall be their turn to die.

I also am employed in writing narrative, but not so useful. Employment, however, and with the pen, is through habit become essential to my well-being; and to produce always original poems, especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished "The Task," and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the *Iliad*; and, merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception of what I was then entering upon than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work; till at last I began to reflect thus:—The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* together consist of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed

many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man that, although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try therefore whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connexions, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not indeed lie much in your way to promote; but among your numerous connexions it is possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean—far be it from me—to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you

though but a moment's pain. You know best your own opportunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much ; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will.

I have lately had three visits from my old school-fellow Mr. Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot, and of Mr. Chester of Chicheley. At his last visit he brought his wife with him, a most amiable woman, to see Mrs. Unwin. I told him my purpose and my progress. He received the news with great pleasure ; immediately subscribed a draft of twenty pounds ; and promised me his whole heart, and his whole interest, which lies principally among people of the first fashion.

My correspondence has lately also been renewed with my dear cousin Lady Hesketh, whom I ever loved as a sister, (for we were in a manner brought up together,) and who writes to me as affectionately as if she were so. She also enters into my views and interests upon this occasion with a warmth that gives me great encouragement. The circle of *her* acquaintance is likewise very extensive ; and I have no doubt that she will exert her influence to its utmost possibilities among them. I have other strings to my bow, (perhaps, as a translator of Homer, I should say, to my lyre,) which I cannot here enumerate ; but, upon the whole, my prospect seems promising enough. I have not yet consulted Johnson upon the occasion, but intend to do it soon.

My spirits are somewhat better than they were. In the course of the last month, I have perceived a very sensible amendment. The hope of better days seems again to dawn upon me; and I have now and then an intimation, though slight and transient, that God has not abandoned me for ever.

Having been for some years troubled with an inconvenient stomach; and lately with a stomach that will digest nothing without help; and we having reached the bottom of our own medical skill, into which we have dived to little or no purpose; I have at length consented to consult Dr. Kerr, and expect to see him in a day or two. Engaged as I am and am likely to be, so long as I am capable of it, in writing for the press, I cannot well afford to entertain a malady that is such an enemy to all mental operations.

This morning is beautiful, and tempts me forth into the garden. It is all the walk that I can have at this season, but not all the exercise. I ring a peal every day upon the dumb-bells.

I am, my dear friend, most truly,

Yours and Mrs. Newton's,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Dec. 10, 1785.

My dear Friend—What you say of my last volume gives me the sincerest pleasure. I have heard

* Private Correspondence.

a like favourable report of it from several different quarters, but never any (for obvious reasons) that has gratified me more than yours. I have a relish for moderate praise, because it bids fair to be judicious; but praise excessive, such as our poor friend ——'s, (I have an uncle also who celebrates me exactly in the same language,)—such praise is rather too big for an ordinary swallow. I set down nine-tenths of it to the account of family partiality. I know no more than you what kind of a market my book has found; but this I believe, that had not Henderson died,* and had it been worth my while to have given him an hundred pounds to have read it in public, it would have been more popular than it is. I am at least very unwilling to esteem John Gilpin as better worth than all the rest that I have written, and he has been popular enough.

Your sentiments of Pope's Homer agree perfectly with those of every competent judge with whom I have at any time conversed about it. I never saw a copy so unlike the original. There is not I believe in all the world to be found an uninspired poem so simple as those of Homer, nor in all the world a poem more bedizened with ornaments than Pope's translation of them. Accordingly, the sublime of Homer in the hands of Pope becomes bloated and tumid, and his description tawdry. Neither had Pope the faintest conception of those exquisite discriminations of character for which Homer is so re-

* A public reciter, well known in his day, who delivered his recitations with all the effect of tone, emphasis, and graceful elocution.

markable. All his persons, and equally upon all occasions, speak in an inflated and strutting phraseology as Pope has managed them; although in the original the dignity of their utterance, even when they are most majestic, consists principally in the simplicity of their sentiments and of their language. Another censure I must needs pass upon our Anglo-Grecian, out of many that obtrude themselves upon me, but for which I have neither time to spare, nor room, which is, that with all his great abilities he was defective in his feelings to a degree that some passages in his own poems make it difficult to account for. No writer more pathetic than Homer, because none more natural; and because none less natural than Pope in his version of Homer, therefore than he none less pathetic. But I shall tire you with a theme with which I would not wish to cloy you beforehand.

If the great change in my experience, of which you express so lively an expectation, should take place, and whenever it shall take place, you may securely depend upon receiving the first notice of it. But, whether you come with congratulations, or whether without them, I need not say that you and yours will always be most welcome here. Mrs. Unwin's love both to yourself and to Mrs. Newton joins itself as usual, and as warmly as usual, to that of

Yours, my dear friend,

Affectionately and faithfully,

W. C.

The following this moment occurs to me as a possible motto for the Messiah, if you do not think it too sharp :—

—— Nunquam inducunt animum cantare, *rogati* ;
Injussi, nunquam desistunt.——

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Dec. 24, 1785.

My dear Friend—You would have found a letter from me at Mr. ——'s, according to your assignment, had not the post, setting out two hours sooner than the usual time, prevented me. The Odyssey that you sent has but one fault, at least but one that I have discovered, which is that I cannot read it. The very attempt, if persevered in, would soon make me as blind as Homer was himself. I am now in the last book of the Iliad, shall be obliged to you therefore for a more legible one by the first opportunity.

I wrote to Johnson lately, desiring him to give me advice and information on the subject of proposals for a subscription, and he desired me in his answer not to use that mode of publication, but to treat with him, adding that he could make me such offers as (he believed) I should approve. I have replied to his letter, but abide by my first purpose.

Having occasion to write to Mr. ——,* concerning his princely benevolence, extended this year also

* John Thornton, Esq.

to the poor of Olney, I put in a good word for my poor self likewise, and have received a very obliging and encouraging answer. He promises me six names in particular, that (he says) will do me no discredit, and expresses a wish to be served with papers as soon as they shall be printed.

I meet with encouragement from all quarters, such as I find need of indeed in an enterprise of such length and moment, but such as at the same time I find effectual. Homer is not a poet to be translated under the disadvantage of doubts and dejection.

Let me sing the praises of the desk which — has sent me. In general, it is as elegant as possible. In particular, it is of cedar beautifully lacquered. When put together, it assumes the form of a handsome small chest, and contains all sorts of accommodations; it is inlaid with ivory, and serves the purpose of a reading desk.*

Your affectionate

W. C

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, Dec. 24, 1785.

My dear Friend—Till I had made such a progress in my present undertaking as to put it out of all doubt that, if I lived, I should proceed in and finish it, I kept the matter to myself. It would have done me little honour to have told my friends

* This interesting relic was bequeathed to Dr. Johnson, and is now in the possession of his family. It was presented to Cowper by Lady Hesketh.

that I had an arduous enterprise in hand, if afterwards I must have told them that I had dropped it. Knowing it to have been universally the opinion of the literati, ever since they have allowed themselves to consider the matter coolly, that a translation, properly so called, of Homer is, notwithstanding what Pope has done, a desideratum in the English language ; it struck me that an attempt to supply the deficiency would be an honourable one, and having made myself, in former years, somewhat critically a master of the original, I was by this double consideration induced to make the attempt myself. I am now translating into blank verse the last book of the Iliad, and mean to publish by subscription.

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Dec. 31, 1785.

My dear William—You have learned from my last that I am now conducting myself upon the plan that you recommended to me in the summer. But since I wrote it, I have made still farther advances in my negociation with Johnson. The proposals are adjusted. The proof-sheet has been printed off, corrected, and returned. They will be sent abroad as soon as I make up a complete list of the personages and persons to whom I would have them sent, which in a few days I hope to be able to accomplish. Johnson behaves very well, at least according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible

that I dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labours, in his own words, "to put something handsome into my pocket," and recommends two large quartos for the whole. He would not, he says, by any means advise an extravagant price, and has fixed it at three guineas, the half, as usual to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. Five hundred names, he adds, at this price will put above a thousand pounds into my purse. I am doing my best to obtain them. Mr. Newton is warm in my service, and can do not a little. I have of course written to Mr. Bagot, who, when he was here, with much earnestness and affection intreated me so to do as soon as I could have settled the conditions. If I could get Sir Richard Sutton's address, I would write to him also, though I have been but once in his company since I left Westminster, where he and I read the Iliad and Odyssey through together. I enclose Lord Dartmouth's answer to my application, which I will get you to show to Lady Hesketh, because it will please her. I shall be glad if you can make an opportunity to call on her during your present stay in town. You observe therefore that I am not wanting to myself. He that is so has no just claim on the assistance of others, neither shall myself have cause to complain of me in other respects. I thank you for your friendly hints and precautions, and shall not fail to give them the guidance of my pen. I respect the public and I respect myself, and had rather want bread than expose myself wantonly to the condemnation of either. I hate the affectation,

so frequently found in authors, of negligence and slovenly slightness, and in the present case am sensible how necessary it is to shun them, when I undertake the vast and invidious labour of doing better than Pope has done before me. I thank you for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular, I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability, when the man you mention applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples, but of verse never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed.

I have frequently thought with pleasure of the summer that you have had in your heart, while you have been employed in softening the severity of winter in behalf of so many who must otherwise have been exposed to it. I wish that you could make a general gaol-delivery, leaving only those behind who cannot elsewhere be so properly disposed of. You never said a better thing in your life than when you assured Mr. — of the expedience of a gift of bedding to the poor of Olney. There is no one article of this world's comforts with which, as Falstaff says, they are so heinously unprovided. When a poor woman, and an honest one, whom we know well, carried home two pair of blankets, a pair for herself and husband, and a pair for her six children; as soon as the children saw

them, they jumped out of their straw, caught them in their arms, kissed them, blessed them, and danced for joy. An old woman, a very old one, the first night that she found herself so comfortably covered, could not sleep a wink, being kept awake by the contrary emotions of transport on the one hand, and the fear of not being thankful enough on the other.

It just occurs to me to say that this manuscript of mine will be ready for the press, as I hope, by the end of February. I shall have finished the *Iliad* in about ten days, and shall proceed immediately to the revision of the whole. You must if possible come down to Olney, if it be only that you may take charge of its safe delivery to Johnson. For, if by any accident it should be lost, I am undone—the first copy being but a lean counterpart of the second.

Your mother joins with me in love and good wishes of every kind to you and all yours.

Adieu,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Jan. 10, 1786.

It gave me great pleasure that you found my friend Unwin, what I was sure you would find him, a most agreeable man. I did not usher him in with the marrow-bones and cleavers of high-sounding panegyric, both because I was certain that, whatsoever merit he had, your discernment would mark

it, and because it is possible to do a man material injury by making his praise his harbinger. It is easy to raise expectation to such a pitch that the reality, be it ever so excellent, must necessarily fall below it.

I hold myself much indebted to Mr. —, of whom I have the first information from yourself, both for his friendly disposition towards me, and for the manner in which he marks the defects in my volume. An author must be tender indeed to wince on being touched so gently. It is undoubtedly as he says, and as you and my uncle say, you cannot be all mistaken, neither is it at all probable that any of you should be so. I take it for granted, therefore, that there are inequalities in the composition, and I do assure you, my dear, most faithfully, that, if it should reach a second edition, I will spare no pains to improve it. It may serve me for an agreeable amusement perhaps when Homer shall be gone, and done with. The first edition of poems has generally been susceptible of improvement. Pope I believe never published one in his life that did not undergo variations, and his longest pieces many. I will only observe that inequalities there must be always, and in every work of length. There are level parts of every subject, parts which we cannot with propriety attempt to elevate. They are by nature humble, and can only be made to assume an awkward and uncouth appearance by being mounted. But again I take it for granted that this remark does not apply to the matter of your objection. You were sufficiently aware of it

before, and have no need, that I should suggest it as an apology, could it have served that office, but would have made it for me yourself. In truth, my dear, had you known in what anguish of mind I wrote the whole of that poem, and under what perpetual interruptions from a cause that has since been removed, so that sometimes I had not an opportunity of writing more than three lines at a sitting, you would long since have wondered as much as I do myself that it turned out any thing better than Grub-street.

My Cousin, give yourself no trouble to find out any of the magi to scrutinize my Homer. I can do without them; and, if I were not conscious that I have no need of their help, I would be the first to call for it. Assure yourself that I intend to be careful to the utmost line of all possible caution, both with respect to language and versification. I will not send a verse to the press that shall not have undergone the strictest examination.

A subscription is surely on every account the most eligible mode of publication. When I shall have emptied the purses of my friends and of their friends into my own, I am still free to levy contributions upon the world at large, and I shall then have a fund to defray the expenses of a new edition. I have ordered Johnson to print the proposals immediately, and hope that they will kiss your hands before the week is expired.

I have had the kindest letter from Josephus that I ever had. He mentioned my purpose to one of

the masters of Eton, who replied, that "such a work is much wanted."

Affectionately yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, Jan. 14, 1786.

My dear William—I am glad that you have seen Lady Hesketh. I knew that you would find her every thing that is amiable and elegant. Else, being my relation, I would never have shown her to you. She also was delighted with her visitor, and expects the greatest pleasure in seeing you again; but is under some apprehensions that a tender regard for the drum of your ear may keep you from her. Never mind! You have two drums, and if she should crack both, I will buy you a trumpet.

General Cowper having much pressed me to accompany my proposals with a specimen, I have sent him one. It is taken from the twenty-fourth book of the Iliad, and is part of the interview between Priam and Achilles. Tell me, if it be possible for any man to tell me—why did Homer leave off at the burial of Hector? Is it possible, that he could be determined to it by a conceit so little worthy of him as that, having made the number of his books completely the alphabetical number, he would not for the joke's sake proceed any further? Why did he not give us the death of Achilles, and the destruction of Troy? Tell me also if the critics, with Aristotle at their head, have not found that he left off

exactly where he should, and that every epic poem to all generations is bound to conclude with the burial of Hector? I do not in the least doubt it. Therefore if I live to write a dozen epic poems I will always take care to bury Hector, and to bring all matters at that point to an immediate conclusion.

I had a truly kind letter from Mr. —, written immediately on his recovery from the fever. I am bound to honour James's powder, not only for the services it has often rendered to myself, but still more for having been the means of preserving a life ten times more valuable to society than mine is ever likely to be.

You say, "Why should I trouble you with my troubles?" I answer, "Why not? What is a friend good for, if we may not lay one end of the sack upon his shoulders, while we ourselves carry the other?"

You see your duty to God, and your duty to your neighbour; and you practise both with your best ability. Yet a certain person accounts you blind. I would, that all the world were so blind even as you are. But there are some in it who, like the Chinese, say, "We have two eyes; and other nations have but one!" I am glad however that in your one eye you have sight enough to discover that such censures are not worth minding.

I thank you heartily for every step you take in the advancement of my present purpose.

Contrive to pay Lady H. a long visit, for she has a thousand things to say.

Yours, my dear William,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Jan. 14, 1786.

My dear Friend — My proposals are already printed. I ought rather to say that they are ready for printing; having near ten days ago returned the correction of the proof. But a cousin of mine, and one who will I dare say be very active in my literary cause, (I mean General Cowper,) having earnestly recommended it to me to annex a specimen, I have accordingly sent him one, extracted from the latter part of the last book of the Iliad, and consisting of a hundred and seven lines. I chose to extract it from that part of the poem, because if the reader should happen to find himself content with it, he will naturally be encouraged by it to hope well of the part preceding. Every man who can do any thing in the translating way is pretty sure to set off with spirit; but in works of such a length, there is always danger of flagging near the close.

My subscription I hope will be more powerfully promoted than subscriptions generally are. I have a warm and affectionate friend in Lady Hesketh; and one equally disposed, and even still more able to serve me, in the General above mentioned. The Bagot family all undertake my cause with ardour; and I have several others, of whose ability and good-will I could not doubt without doing them injustice. It will however be necessary to bestow yet much time on the revisal of this work, for many

* Private Correspondence.

reasons ; and especially, because he who contends with Pope upon Homer's ground can of all writers least afford to be negligent.

Mr. Scott brought me as much as he could remember of a kind message from Lord Dartmouth ; but it was rather imperfectly delivered. Enough of it however came to hand to convince me that his lordship takes a friendly interest in my success. When his lordship and I sat side by side, on the sixth form at Westminster, we little thought that in process of time one of us was ordained to give a new translation of Homer. Yet at that very time it seems I was laying the foundation of this superstructure.

Much love upon all accounts to you and yours.

Adieu, my friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

Olney, Jan. 15, 1786.

My dear Friend—I have just time to give you a hasty line to explain to you the delay that the publication of my proposals has unexpectedly encountered, and at which I suppose that you have been somewhat surprised.

I have a near relation in London, and a warm friend in General Cowper ; he is also a person as able as willing to render me material service. I lately made him acquainted with my design of sending into the world a new Translation of Homer, and

told him that my papers would soon attend him. He soon after desired that I would annex to them a specimen of the work. To this I at first objected, for reasons that need not be enumerated here, but at last acceded to his advice; and accordingly the day before yesterday I sent him a specimen. It consists of one hundred and seven lines, and is taken from the interview between Priam and Achilles in the last book. I chose to extract from the latter end of the poem, and as near to the close of it as possible, that I might encourage a hope in the readers of it, that if they found it in some degree worthy of their approbation, they would find the former parts of the work not less so. For if a writer flags any where, it must be when he is near the end.

My subscribers will have an option given them in the proposals respecting the price. My predecessor in the same business was not quite so moderate. You may say, perhaps, (at least if your kindness for me did not prevent it, you would be ready to say,) "It is well—but do you place yourself on a level with Pope?" I answer, or rather *should* answer, "By no means—not as a poet; but as a translator of Homer, if I did not expect and believe that I should even surpass him why have I meddled with this matter at all? If I confess inferiority, I reprobate my own undertaking."

When I can hear of the rest of the bishops that they preach and live as your brother does, I will think more respectfully of them than I feel inclined to do at present. They may be learned, and I know that some of them are; but your brother, learned

as he is, has other more powerful recommendations. Persuade him to publish his poetry, and I promise you that he shall find as warm and sincere an admirer in me as in any man that lives.

Yours, my dear friend,

Very affectionately,

W. C.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

Olney, Jan. 23, 1786.

My dear and faithful Friend—

* *

* * * *

The paragraph that I am now beginning will contain information of a kind that I am not very fond of communicating, and on a subject that I am not very fond of writing about. Only to you I will open my budget without any reserve, because I know that in what concerns my authorship you take an interest that demands my confidence, and will be pleased with every occurrence that is at all propitious to my endeavours. Lady Hesketh, who, had she as many mouths as Virgil's Fame, with a tongue in each, would employ them all in my service, writes me word that Dr. Maty of the Museum has read my "Task." I cannot, even to you, relate what he says of it, though, when I began this story, I thought I had courage enough to tell it boldly. He designs however to give his opinion of it in his next Monthly Review, and, being informed that I was about to finish a translation of Homer, asked

her ladyship's leave to mention the circumstance on that occasion. This incident pleases me the more, because I have authentic intelligence of his being a critical character, in all its forms, acute, sour, and blunt, and so incorruptible withal, and so unsusceptible of bias from undue motives, that, as my correspondent informs me, he would not praise his own mother, did he not think she deserved it.

The said "Task" is likewise gone to Oxford, conveyed thither by an intimate friend of Dr. —, with a purpose of putting it into his hands. My friend, what will they do with me at Oxford? Will they burn me at Carfax, or will they anathematize me with bell, book, and candle? I can say with more truth than Ovid did—*Parve, nec invideo*.

The said Dr. — has been heard to say, and I give you his own words, (stop both your ears while I utter them,) "that Homer has never been translated, and that Pope was a fool." Very irreverend language, to be sure, but, in consideration of the subject on which he used them, we will pardon it, even in a dean.* One of the masters of Eton told a friend of mine lately that a translation of Homer is much wanted. So now you have all my news.

Yours, my dear friend, cordially,

W. C.

* The person here alluded to is Dr. Cyril Jackson, dean of Christ Church, Oxford, a man of profound acquirements and of great classical taste. He was formerly preceptor to the Prince of Wales, afterwards George IV.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Jan. 31, 1786.

It is very pleasant, my dearest Cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself therefore driven by stress of necessity to the following resolutions, viz. that I will constitute you my Thanks-receiver-general, for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my Cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honoured with; for a snuff-box of tortoiseshell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the fore-ground, and inscribed above with these words, *The Peasant's Nest*—and below with these, *Tiney, Puss, and Bess*. For all and every of these I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank you that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand.—There! Now I am a little easier.

I have almost conceived a design to send up half a dozen stout country-fellows to tie by the leg to their respective bed-posts the company that so abridges your opportunity of writing to me. Your letters are the joy of my heart, and I cannot endure to be robbed, by I know not whom, of half

my treasure. But there is no comfort without a drawback, and therefore it is that I who have unknown friends have unknown enemies also. Ever since I wrote last, I find myself in better health, and my nocturnal spasms and fever considerably abated. I intend to write to Dr. Kerr on Thursday, that I may gratify him with an account of my amendment: for to him I know that it will be a gratification. Were he not a physician, I should regret that he lives so distant, for he is a most agreeable man;* but, being what he is, it would be impossible to have his company, even if he were a neighbour, unless in time of sickness, at which time, whatever charms he might have himself, my own must necessarily lose much of their effect on him.

When I write to you, my dear, what I have already related to the General, I am always fearful lest I should tell you that for news with which you are well acquainted. For once, however, I will venture. On Wednesday last I received from Johnson the MS. copy of a specimen that I had sent to the General, and inclosed in the same cover Notes upon it by an unknown critic. Johnson, in a short letter, recommended him to me as a man of unquestionable learning and ability. On perusal and consideration of his remarks, I found him such, and, having nothing so much at heart as to give all possible security to yourself and the General that my work shall not come forth unfinished, I answered Johnson

* Dr. Kerr was an eminent physician, in great practice, and resident at Northampton.

that I would gladly submit my MS. to his friend. He is in truth a very clever fellow, perfectly a stranger to me, and one who, I promise you, will not spare for severity of animadversion, where he shall find occasion. It is impossible for you, my dearest Cousin, to express a wish that I do not equally feel a wish to gratify. You are desirous that Maty should see a book of my Homer, and for that reason, if Maty *will* see a book of it, he shall be welcome, although time is likely to be precious, and consequently any delay that is not absolutely necessary as much as possible to be avoided. I am now revising the "Iliad." It is a business that will cost me four months, perhaps five; for I compare the very words as I go, and, if much alteration should occur, must transcribe the whole. The first book I have almost transcribed already. To these five months Johnson says that nine more must be added for printing, and upon my own experience, I will venture to assure you that the tardiness of printers will make those nine months twelve. There is danger therefore that my subscribers may think that I make them wait too long, and that they who know me not may suspect a bubble. How glad shall I be to read it over in an evening, book by book, as fast as I settle the copy, to you and to Mrs. Unwin! She has been my touchstone always, and without reference to her taste and judgment I have printed nothing. With one of you at each elbow, I should think myself the happiest of all poets.

The General and I, having broken the ice, are

upon the most comfortable terms of correspondence. He writes very affectionately to me, and I say every thing that comes uppermost. I could not write frequently to any creature living upon any other terms than those. He tells me of infirmities that he has, which make him less active than he was. I am sorry to hear that he has any such. Alas! alas! he was young when I saw him, only twenty years ago.

I have the most affectionate letter imaginable from Colman, who writes to me like a brother. The Chancellor is yet dumb.

May God have you in his keeping, my beloved Cousin.

Farewell,

W. C.

Lady Hesketh having announced her intention of paying a visit to Cowper, the following letters abound in all that delightful anticipation, which the prospect of renewing so endeared an intercourse naturally suggested.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Feb. 9, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—I have been impatient to tell you that I am impatient to see you again. Mrs. Unwin partakes with me in all my feelings upon this subject, and longs also to see you. I should have told you so by the last post, but have been so

completely occupied by this tormenting specimen, that it was impossible to do it. I sent the General a letter on Monday that would distress and alarm him; I sent him another yesterday, that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures; and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison with the original, so that (I doubt not) we shall jog on merrily together. And now, my dear, let me tell you once more that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, every thing that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment. Talk not of an inn! Mention it not for your life! We have never had so many visitors but we could easily accommodate them all, though we have received Unwin, and his wife, and his sister, and his son, all at once. My dear, I will not let you come till the end of May, or beginning of June, because, before that time my green-house will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit, with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention the country will not be in complete beauty. And I

will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present. But he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand stands a cupboard, the work of the same author ; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made. But, a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament ; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the farther end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long. Order yourself, my Cousin, to the Swan, at Newport, and there you shall find me ready to conduct you to Olney.

My dear, I have told Homer what you say about casks and urns, and have asked him whether he is sure that it is a cask in which Jupiter keeps his wine. He swears that it is a cask, and that it will never be any thing better than a cask to eternity. So if the god is content with it, we must even wonder at his taste, and be so too.

Adieu ! my dearest, dearest Cousin,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Feb. 11, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—It must be, I suppose, a fortnight or thereabout since I wrote last, I feel myself so alert and so ready to write again. Be that as it may, here I come. We talk of nobody but you. What we will do with you when we get you, where you shall walk, where you shall sleep, in short every thing that bears the remotest relation to your well-being at Olney, occupies all our talking time, which is all that I do not spend at Troy.

I have every reason for writing to you as often as I can, but I have a particular reason for doing it now. I want to tell you, that by the Diligence on Wednesday next I mean to send you a quire of my Homer for Maty's perusal. It will contain the first book, and as much of the second as brings us to the catalogue of the ships, and is every morsel of the revised copy that I have transcribed. My dearest Cousin, read it yourself, let the General read it, do what you please with it, so that it reach Johnson in due time. But let Maty be the only *Critic* that has any thing to do with it. The vexation, the perplexity, that attends a multiplicity of criticisms by various hands, many of which are sure to be futile, many of them ill-founded, and some of them contradictory to others, is inconceivable, except by the author, whose ill-fated work happens

to be the subject of them. This also appears to me self-evident, that if a work have passed under the review of one man of taste and learning, and have had the good fortune to please him, his approbation gives security for that of all others qualified like himself. I speak thus, my dear, after having just escaped from such a storm of trouble, occasioned by endless remarks, hints, suggestions, and objections, as drove me almost to despair, and to the very verge of a resolution to drop my undertaking for ever. With infinite difficulty I at last sifted the chaff from the wheat, availing myself of what appeared to me to be just, and rejected the rest, but not till the labour and anxiety had nearly undone all that Kerr had been doing for me. My beloved Cousin, trust me for it, as you safely may, that temper, vanity, and self-importance had nothing to do in all this distress that I suffered. It was merely the effect of an alarm that I could not help taking, when I compared the great trouble I had with a few lines only, thus handled, with that which I foresaw such handling of the whole must necessarily give me. I felt beforehand that my constitution would not bear it. I shall send up this second specimen in a box that I have had made on purpose; and when Maty has done with the copy, and you have done with it yourself, then you must return it in said box to my translatorship. Though Johnson's friend has teased me sadly, I verily believe that I shall have no more such cause to complain of him. We now understand one another, and I firmly believe that I might have gone the world through

before I had found his equal in an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original.

A letter to Mr. Urban in the last Gentleman's Magazine, of which I's book is the subject, pleases me more than any thing I have seen in the way of eulogium yet. I have no guess of the author.

I do not wish to remind the Chancellor of his promise. Ask you why, my Cousin? Because I suppose it would be impossible. He has no doubt, forgotten it entirely, and would be obliged to take my word for the truth of it, which I could not bear. We drank tea together with Mrs. C——e, and her sister, in King-street, Bloomsbury, and there was the promise made. I said, "Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be Chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are." He smiled, and replied, "I surely will." "These ladies," said I, "are witnesses." He still smiled, and said "Let them be so, for I will certainly do it." But alas! twenty-four years have passed since the day of the date thereof; and to mention it now would be to upbraid him with inattention to his plighted troth. Neither do I suppose that he could easily serve such a creature as I am, if he would.

Adieu, whom I love entirely,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, Feb. 18, 1786.

My dear Friend—I feel myself truly obliged to you for the leave that you give me to be less frequent in writing, and more brief than heretofore. I have a long work upon my hands ; and, standing engaged to the public (for by this time I suppose my subscription papers to be gone abroad, not only for the performance of it, but for the performance of it in a reasonable time,) it seems necessary to me not to intermit it often. My correspondence has also lately been renewed with several of my relations, and unavoidably engrosses now and then one of the few opportunities that I can find for writing. I nevertheless intend, in the exchange of letters with you, to be as regular as I can be, and to use, like a friend, the friendly allowance that you have made me.

My reason for giving notice of an *Odyssey* as well as an *Iliad*, was this :—I feared that the public, being left to doubt whether I should ever translate the former, would be unwilling to treat with me for the latter ; which they would be apt to consider as an odd volume, and unworthy to stand upon their shelves alone. It is hardly probable however, that I should begin the *Odyssey* for some months to come, being now closely engaged in the revisal of my translation of the *Iliad*, which I compare as I go most minutely with the original. One of the great defects of Pope's transla-

* Private Correspondence.

tion is that it is licentious. To publish therefore a translation now, that should be at all chargeable with the same fault, that were not indeed as close and as faithful as possible, would be only *actum agere*, and had therefore better be left undone. Whatever be said of mine when it shall appear, it shall never be said that it is not faithful.

I thank you heartily, both for your wishes and prayers that, should a disappointment occur, I may not be too much hurt by it. Strange as it may seem to say it, and unwilling as I should be to say it to any person less candid than yourself, I will nevertheless say that I have not entered on this work, unconnected as it must needs appear with the interests of the cause of God, without the direction of his providence, nor altogether unassisted by him in the performance of it. Time will show to what it ultimately tends. I am inclined to believe that it has a tendency to which I myself am at present perfectly a stranger. Be that as it may, he knows my frame, and will consider that I am but dust; dust, into the bargain, that has been so trampled under foot and beaten, that a storm, less violent than an unsuccessful issue of such a business might occasion, would be sufficient to blow me quite away. But I will tell you honestly, I have no fears upon the subject. My predecessor has given me every advantage.

As I know not to what end this my present occupation may finally lead, so neither did I know, when I wrote it, or at all suspect one valuable end at least that was to be answered by "The Task." It has pleased God to prosper it; and, being composed

in blank verse, it is likely to prove as seasonable an introduction to a blank verse Homer by the same hand as any that could have been devised; yet, when I wrote the last line of "The Task," I as little suspected that I should ever engage in a version of the old Asiatic tale as you do now.

I should choose for your general motto :—

Carmina tum melius, cùm venerit ipse, canemus.

For Vol. I.

Unum pro multis dabitur caput.

For Vol. II.

Aspice, venturo lætentur ut omnia sæclo.

It seems to me that you cannot have better than these.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, Feb. 19, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—Since so it must be, so it shall be. If you will not sleep under the roof of a friend, may you never sleep under the roof of an enemy! An enemy, however, you will not presently find Mrs. Unwin bids me mention her affectionately, and tell you that she willingly gives up a part, for the sake of the rest—willingly, at least as far as

willingly may consist with some reluctance: I feel my reluctance too. Our design was that you should have slept in the room that serves me for a study, and its having been occupied by you would have been an additional recommendation of it to me. But all reluctances are superseded by the thought of seeing you; and because we have nothing so much at heart as the wish to see you happy and comfortable, we are desirous therefore to accommodate you to your own mind, and not to ours. Mrs. Unwin has already secured for you an apartment, or rather two, just such as we could wish. The house in which you will find them is within thirty yards of our own, and opposite to it. The whole affair is thus commodiously adjusted; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my Cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say, and they will all rush into my mind together, till it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter—sooner or later they will all come out; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our own roof, (a circumstance that more than any thing reconciles us to that measure,) they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation, a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life, we shall meet each other as alive from the dead; and for my own part I can truly say, that I have not a friend in the other world whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure.

I am truly happy, my dear, in having pleased you

with what you have seen of my Homer. I wish that all English readers had your unsophisticated, or rather unadulterated taste, and could relish simplicity like you. But I am well aware that in this respect I am under a disadvantage, and that many, especially many ladies, missing many turns and pretinences of expression, that they have admired in Pope, will account my translation in those particulars defective. But I comfort myself with the thought, that in reality it is no defect, on the contrary, that the want of all such embellishments as do not belong to the original will be one of its principal merits with persons indeed capable of relishing Homer. He is the best poet that ever lived for many reasons, but for none more than for that majestic plainness that distinguishes him from all others. As an accomplished person moves gracefully without thinking of it, in like manner the dignity of Homer seems to cost him no labour. It was natural to him to say great things, and to say them well, and little ornaments were beneath his notice. If Maty, my dearest Cousin, should return to you my copy, with any such strictures as may make it necessary for me to see it again, before it goes to Johnson, in that case you shall send it to me, otherwise to Johnson immediately; for he writes me word he wishes his friend to go to work upon it as soon as possible. When you come, my dear, we will hang all these critics together; for they have worried me without remorse or conscience. At least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance

with his requisitions, but plucked up my courage at last, and, in the very last opportunity that I had, recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time I readily confess that the specimen is the better for all this discipline its author has undergone, but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr. Critic; for, as sure as you are my Cousin, whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief, if I would have given him leave.

My friend Bagot writes to me in a most friendly strain, and calls loudly upon me for original poetry. When I shall have done with Homer, probably he will not call in vain. Having found the prime feather of a swan on the banks of the *smug and silver Trent*, he keeps it for me.

Adieu, dear Cousin,

W. C

I am sorry that the General has such indifferent health. He must not die. I can by no means spare a person so kind to me.

TO THE REV. WALTER BAGOT.

Olney, Feb. 27, 1786.

Alas! alas! my dear, dear friend, may God himself comfort you! I will not be so absurd as to attempt it.* By the close of your letter, it should

* Mr. Bagot had recently sustained the loss of his wife.

seem that in this hour of great trial he withholds not his consolations from you. I know, by experience, that they are neither few nor small; and though I feel for you as I never felt for man before, yet do I sincerely rejoice in this, that, whereas there is but one true comforter in the universe, under afflictions such as yours, you both know Him and know where to seek Him. I thought you a man the most happily mated that I had ever seen, and had great pleasure in your felicity. Pardon me, if now I feel a wish that, short as my acquaintance with her was, I had never seen her. I should have mourned with you, but not as I do now. Mrs. Unwin sympathizes with you also most sincerely, and you neither are nor will be soon forgotten in such prayers as we can make at Olney. I will not detain you longer now, my poor afflicted friend, than to commit you to the tender mercy of God, and to bid you a sorrowful adieu!

Adieu! Ever yours,
W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, March 6, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—Your opinion has more weight with me than that of all the critics in the world; and, to give you a proof of it, I make you a concession that I would hardly have made to them all united. I do not indeed absolutely covenant, promise, and agree, that I will discard *all* my elisions, but I hereby bind

myself to dismiss *as many* of them as, without sacrificing energy to sound, I can. It is incumbent upon me in the mean time to say something in justification of the few that I shall retain, that I may not seem a poet mounted rather on a mule than on Pegasus. In the first place, *The* is a barbarism. We are indebted for it to the Celts, or the Goths, or to the Saxons, or perhaps to them all. In the two best languages that ever were spoken, the Greek and the Latin, there is no similar incumbrance of expression to be found. Secondly, the perpetual use of it in our language is, to us miserable poets, attended with two great inconveniences. Our verse consisting only of ten syllables, it not unfrequently happens that the fifth part of a line is to be engrossed, and necessarily too, unless elision prevents it, by this abominable intruder, and which is worse in my account, open vowels are continually the consequence—*The* element—*The* air, &c. Thirdly, the French, who are equally with the English chargeable with barbarism in this particular, dispose of their *Le* and their *La* without ceremony, and always take care that they shall be absorbed, both in verse and in prose, in the vowel that immediately follows them. Fourthly, and I believe lastly, (and for your sake I wish it may prove so,) the practice of cutting short *The* is warranted by Milton, who of all English poets that ever lived, had certainly the finest ear. Dr. Warton indeed has dared to say that he had a bad one, for which he deserves, as far as critical demerit can deserve it, to lose his own. I thought I had done, but there is still a fifthly behind; and

it is this, that the custom of abbreviating *The*, belongs to the style in which, in my advertisement annexed to the specimen, I profess to write. The use of that style would have warranted me in the practice of much greater liberty of this sort than I ever intended to take. In perfect consistence with that style, I might say, I' th' tempest, I' th' doorway, &c. which, however, I would not allow myself to do, because I was aware that it would be objected to, and with reason. But it seems to me, for the causes above said, that when I shorten *The*, before a vowel, or before *wh*, as in the line you mention,

“Than th' whole broad Hellespont in all its parts,”

my licence is not equally exceptionable, because *W*, though he rank as a consonant, in the word *whole*, is not allowed to announce himself to the ear; and *H* is an aspirate. But as I said in the beginning, so say I still, I am most willing to conform myself to your very sensible observation, that it is necessary, if we would please, to consult the taste of our own day; neither would I have pelted you, my dearest Cousin, with any part of this volley of good reasons, had I not designed them as an answer to those objections, which you say you have heard from others. But I only mention them. Though satisfactory to myself, I wave them, and will allow to *The* his whole dimensions, whensoever it can be done.

Thou only critic of my verse that is to be found in all the earth, whom I love, what shall I say in answer to your own objection to that passage?

“ Softly he placed his hand
On th’ old man’s hand, and pushed it gently away.”

I can say neither more nor less than this, that when our dear friend, the General, sent me his opinion on the specimen, quoting those very words from it, he added—“ With this part I was particularly pleased: there is nothing in poetry more descriptive.” Such were his very words. Taste, my dear, is various; there is nothing so various; and even between persons of the best taste there are diversities of opinion on the same subject, for which it is not possible to account. So much for these matters.

You advise me to consult the General and to confide in him. I follow your advice, and have done both. By the last post I asked his permission to send him the books of my Homer, as fast as I should finish them off. I shall be glad of his remarks, and more glad, than of any thing, to do that which I hope may be agreeable to him. They will of course pass into your hands before they are sent to Johnson. The quire that I sent is now in the hands of Johnson’s friend. I intended to have told you in my last, but forgot it, that Johnson behaves very handsomely in the affair of my two volumes. He acts with a liberality not often found in persons of his occupation, and to mention it when occasion calls me to it is a justice due to him.

I am very much pleased with Mr. Stanley’s letter—several compliments were paid me on the subject of that first volume by my own friends, but I do not recollect that I ever knew the opinion of a stranger about it before, whether favourable or otherwise; I

only heard by a side wind that it was very much read in Scotland, and more than here.

Farewell, my dearest Cousin, whom we expect, of whom we talk continually, and whom we continually long for.

W. C.

P. S. Your anxious wishes for my success delight me, and you may rest assured, my dear, that I have all the ambition on the subject that you can wish me to feel. I more than admire my author. I often stand astonished at his beauties: I am for ever amused with the translation of him, and I have received a thousand encouragements. These are all so many happy omens that I hope shall be verified by the event.

TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.

Olney, March 13, 1786.

My dear Friend—I seem to be about to write to you, but I foresee that it will not be a letter, but a scrap that I shall send you. I could tell you things, that, knowing how much you interest yourself in my success, I am sure would please you, but every moment of my leisure is necessarily spent at Troy. I am revising my translation, and bestowing on it more labour than at first. At the repeated solicitation of General Cowper, who had doubtless irrefragable reason on his side, I have put my book into the hands of the most extraordinary critic that I

have ever heard of. He is a Swiss ; has an accurate knowledge of English, and, for his knowledge of Homer, has I verily believe no fellow. Johnson recommended him to me. I am to send him the quires as fast as I finish them off, and the first is now in his hands. I have the comfort to be able to tell you that he is very much pleased with what he has seen : Johnson wrote to me lately on purpose to tell me so. Things having taken this turn, I fear that I must beg a release from my engagement to put the MS. into your hands. I am bound to print as soon as three hundred shall have subscribed, and consequently have not an hour to spare.

People generally love to go where they are admired, yet Lady Hesketh complains of not having seen you.

Yours,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.*

Olney, April 1, 1786.

My dear Friend—I have made you wait long for an answer, and am now obliged to write in a hurry. But, lest my longer silence should alarm you, hurried as I am, still I write. I told you, if I mistake not, that the circle of my correspondence has lately been enlarged, and it seems still increasing ; which, together with my poetical business, makes an *hour* a *momentous* affair. Pardon an unintentional pun. You

* Private Correspondence.

need not fear for my health : it suffers nothing by my employment.

We who in general see no company are at present in expectation of a great deal, at least, if three different visits may be called so. Mr. and Mrs. Powley, in the first place, are preparing for a journey southward. She is far from well, but thinks herself well enough to travel, and feels an affectionate impatience for another sight of Olney.*

In the next place, we expect, as soon as the season shall turn up bright and warm, General Cowper and his son. I have not seen him these twenty years and upwards, but our intercourse, having been lately revived, is likely to become closer, warmer, and more intimate than ever.

Lady Hesketh also comes down in June, and if she can be accommodated with any thing in the shape of a dwelling at Olney, talks of making it always, in part, her summer residence. It has pleased God that I should, like Joseph, be put into a well, and, because there are no Midianites in the way to deliver me, therefore my friends are coming down into the well to see me.

I wish you, we both wish you, all happiness in your new habitation : at least you will be sure to find the situation more commodious. I thank you for all your hints concerning my work, which shall be duly attended to. You may assure all whom it may concern, that all offensive elisions will be done away. With Mrs. Unwin's love to yourself and Mrs. Newton, I remain, my dear friend, affectionately yours,

W. C.

* Mrs. Unwin's daughter.

The friends of Cowper were not without alarm at his engaging in so lengthened and perilous an undertaking as a new version of the *Iliad*, when the popular translation of Pope seemed to render such an attempt superfluous. To one of his correspondents, who urged this objection, he makes the following reply.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

Olney, April 5, 1786.

I did, as you suppose, bestow all possible consideration on the subject of an apology for my Homeric undertaking. I turned the matter about in my mind a hundred different ways, and, in every way in which it would present itself, found it an impracticable business. It is impossible for me, with what delicacy soever I may manage it, to state the objections that lie against Pope's translation, without incurring odium and the imputation of arrogance; foreseeing this danger, I choose to say nothing.

W. C.

P. S. You may well wonder at my courage, who have undertaken a work of such enormous length. You would wonder more if you knew that I translated the whole *Iliad* with no other help than a *Clavis*. But I have since equipped myself better for this immense journey, and am revising the work in company with a good commentator.

The motives which induced Cowper to engage in

a new version of the *Iliad* originated in the conviction, that, however Pope's translation might be embellished with harmonious numbers, and all the charm and grace of poetic diction, it failed in being a correct and faithful representation of that immortal production. Its character is supposed to be justly designated by its title of "Pope's Homer." It is not the Homer of the heroic ages; it does not express his majesty—his unadorned, yet sublime simplicity. It is Homer in modern costume, decked in a court dress, and in the trappings of refined taste and fashion. His sententious brevity, which possesses the art of conveying much compressed in a short space, is also expanded and dilated, till it resembles a paraphrase, and an imitation, rather than a just and accurate version of its expressive, and speaking original. We believe this to be the general estimate of the merits of Pope's translation. Profound scholars, and one especially, whose discriminating taste and judgment conferred authority on his decision, Dr. Cyril Jackson, (formerly the well-known Dean of Christ Church, Oxford,) concur in this opinion. But notwithstanding this redundancy of artificial ornament, and the "laboured elegance of polished version," the translation of Pope will perhaps always retain its pre-eminence, and be considered what Johnson calls it, "the noblest version of poetry which the world has ever seen," and "its publication one of the greatest events in the annals of learning."*

* See Johnson's *Life of Pope*. The original manuscript copy of Pope's translation is deposited in the British Museum.

Of the merits of Cowper's translation, we shall have occasion hereafter to speak. But it is due to the cause of sound criticism, and to the merited claims of his laborious undertaking, to declare that he who would wish to know and understand Homer must seek for him in the expressive and unadorned version of Cowper.

In the course of the following letters we shall discover many interesting particulars of the progress of this undertaking.

Cowper was now looking forward with great anxiety, to the promised visit of Lady Hesketh. The following letter adverts to the preparations making at the vicarage at Olney for her reception; and to her delicate mode of administering to his personal comforts and enjoyments.

TO LADY HESKETH.

Olney, April 17, 1786.

My dearest Cousin—If you will not quote Solomon, my dearest Cousin, I will. He says, and as beautifully as truly—"Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life!" I feel how much reason he had on his side when he made this observation, and am myself sick of your fortnight's delay.

* * * *

The vicarage was built by Lord Dartmouth, and was not finished till some time after we arrived at

Olney, consequently it is new. It is a smart stone building, well sashed, by much too good for the living, but just what I would wish for you. It has, as you justly concluded from my premises, a garden, but rather calculated for use than ornament. It is square, and well walled, but has neither arbour nor alcove, nor other shade, except the shadow of the house. But we have two gardens, which are yours. Between your mansion and ours is interposed nothing but an orchard, into which a door, opening out of our garden, affords us the easiest communication imaginable, will save the round about by the town, and make both houses one. Your chamber-windows look over the river, and over the meadows, to a village called Emberton, and command the whole length of a long bridge, described by a certain poet, together with a view of the road at a distance.* Should you wish for books at Olney, you must bring them with you, or you will wish in vain, for I have none but the works of a certain poet, Cowper, of whom perhaps you have heard, and they are as yet but two volumes. They may multiply hereafter, but at present they are no more.

You are the first person for whom I have heard Mrs. Unwin express such feelings as she does for you. She is not profuse in professions, nor forward to enter into treaties of friendship with new faces,

* Hark! 'tis the twanging horn o'er yonder bridge,
That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon
Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright.

The Task, Book 4th.

but when her friendship is once engaged, it may be confided in, even unto death. She loves you already, and how much more will she love you before this time twelve-month ! I have indeed endeavoured to describe you to her, but, perfectly as I have you by heart, I am sensible that my picture cannot do you justice. I never saw one that did. Be you what you may, you are much beloved, and will be so at Olney, and Mrs. U. expects you with the pleasure that one feels at the return of a long absent, dear relation ; that is to say, with a pleasure such as mine. She sends you her warmest affections.

On Friday, I received a letter from dear Anonymous,* apprizing me of a parcel that the coach would bring me on Saturday. Who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does ? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be so sacred to me, that, if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about, that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions, lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness and occasional slight inflammations it is probable that they will always be, but I cannot remember the time

* Lady Hesketh adopted this delicate mode of extending her kindness to the Poet.